



BLUE AND GRAY WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

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Price 5 Cents.

SADDLE AND SABRE; OR, THE BOYS IN BLUE'S HARD RIDE.

By LIEUT HARRY LEE.



The Confederate Cavalry were riding to head them off on the left, while a dismounted trooper ran alongside and aimed a pistol at them. Jack swung his sword aloft and cried:

"Hang on, Bess! They'll never take us alive!"

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OR,

The Boys in Blue's Hard Ride.

By LIEUT. HARRY LEE.

CHAPTER I.

COLONEL GORDON'S PROJECT.

"I think, sir, that something should be done. The situation is fast becoming serious. This man Forrest is the worst stumbling block in the way of our army's advance."

General Grant, the silent man, listened to this statement quickly. It was made by Colonel Chester Gordon, one of the most daring of cavalymen. Striding up and down in the tent of the great commander-in-chief, Gordon was greatly excited.

General Grant shifted his cigar between his teeth, and while not a line of his strong face quivered, he said curtly:

"Wipe him out!"

"Ah, there it is," said Gordon testily. "I am given that advice on all sides. Simply chase the fox to his covert and smoke him out. It seems easy, don't it? I shall be glad if you will tell me how to do it."

"I can," said General Grant briefly.

Gordon drew a deep, rasping breath. He leaned over the back of a camp chair and gazed at his chief.

"I shall be glad," he said.

General Grant drew a map across the table. He placed his thumb quickly on a certain spot.

"Forrest overtook one of our trains there yesterday and burned twenty wagons, did he not?"

"He did, thus cutting off thousands of dollars worth of supplies from our hungry troops."

"Very good! At the present moment you don't know where he is?"

"No."

"Where is the next wagon train? Where does it come from, and when is it due?"

Gordon knit his brow.

"Let me see," he said. "General Washburne is moving eastward from Helena, Arkansas. If I remember, that is your order?"

"It is."

"I suppose your idea is to bring him onto the rear of Pemberton's Army at Grenada."

"Yes."

"Well, if I am right, Washburne's supply train is moving east somewhere between here and the Mississippi River."

General Grant bowed.

"You are right," he said. "Now if you want to find Forrest or Fighting Joe Wheeler there is the place to look for them. If I were colonel of your cavalry battalion I would look for the foe where there is likely to be something for him to do. You ought to know how to do the rest."

"I do know how to do the rest," said Gordon, "and I shall follow your hint, General Grant. I own that I never thought of it before. But there is another thing to consider."

"What?"

"I have not a strong enough force to attack Forrest. I need a thousand more men."

General Grant snuffed the ashes from his cigar.

"They are yours," he said.

"Ah, but we haven't got them. The cavalry division of this army is limited."

"It is easy to remedy that. I can give you mounted infantry."

An important exclamation escaped Gordon.

"What show would they stand against the cavalry of Forrest?" he cried.

"Don't be so hasty," said General Grant with a grim smile. "I know one infantry company in this camp that can leap into the saddle without a minute's warning, and I doubt if you have a hundred men in your company who can match them for efficiency and bravery."

"Indeed," said Gordon incredulously. "Do I know this remarkable aggregation of infantrymen?"

"I think you do. They are known as the Fairdale Blues. Their young captain, Jack Clark, has proved his ability to me."

"Ah!" said the cavalry colonel with a shrug of the shoulders. "I have heard of Captain Jack Clark and his Fairdale Blues. Attach them to my battalion if you wish and I will try them out."

"That will hardly be necessary, for they have been well tried out already."

"The deuce! They must be pets of yours!"

"I don't deny that I am fond of them," said General Grant with a grim smile. "They have never failed me. I will send for Captain Clark now. Orderly!"

But the general's command died on his lips. In the door of the tent appeared a youth slender but built of muscular material. His face was handsome, open and his gaze fearless.

He saluted respectfully.

"Pardon me," he said; "I am Captain Clark, of the Fairdale Blues. While waiting outside I heard you use my name and have responded."

General Grant's face was a study. He was silent a moment, while Gordon regarded the boy captain critically.

"I have heard much of you and your company of Blues, Captain Clark," he said.

"I have also heard of you, Colonel Gordon."

"What I have heard of you has been creditable."

"I may say the same thing of you."

Gordon held out his hand and Jack Clark shook it. It seemed to establish good feeling between them. Or, at least, such was the outward appearance.

But General Grant's comprehensive eye took in something which might escape the casual observer. This was that absurd prejudice which has always existed between the

soldier of the regular army and the volunteer or citizen militia, as they are called.

Colonel Gordon was a regular army officer. The young captain of the Blues was not. This foolish barrier therefore existed between them.

But General Grant's gaze kindled as it rested upon the manly figure of the boy captain, and he said:

"Clark, we have some lively work for you and your boys."

"I am glad to know that," cried the young captain. "My boys are eager for work."

"I will give you a requisition on the quartermaster-general for horses. You will mount your company as infantry and join Colonel Gordon's force. You are to ride west and find Forrest. Keep him from attacking Washburne's supply train, and if possible wipe him out."

Jack Clark saluted and turned to the tent entrance.

"When shall I report to you, Colonel Gordon?" he asked.

"As soon as you can."

"I will report at your headquarters within an hour, or as soon as I can get horses."

"Very good, captain."

Jack Clark left General Grant's tent. Colonel Gordon turned to his superior and said:

"On my word, general, that young fellow has lots of snap."

"Well, I think so," replied Grant. "I have sent him out on some desperate enterprises and he has never yet failed me."

"If that is the case I will put his company ahead as scouts, or advance guard."

"You can do no better."

"Very good, general! I am going to follow your plan. I will report to you as soon as I have obtained results."

"Very well, Colonel Gordon. I hope you will get Forrest."

And with this General Grant turned back to his maps and his work. Colonel Gordon left the tent.

Jack Clark, captain of the Fairdale Blues, was much pleased with the idea of mounting his company. He knew the boys would be pleased also.

Previous to the outbreak of the war Jack Clark, with scores of other youths, had attended school at the academy in the little town of Fairdale, in New York State. His dearest friend and chum was Will Prentiss, the son of a wealthy resident of Richmond, Virginia.

Colonel Prentiss, who was a typical Southern gentleman, had not the usual Southern prejudice against the North and sent his son and daughter to Fairdale for their education.

Will Prentiss and Jack Clark became bosom friends. Between Jack and Nellie Prentiss, Will's charming and pretty sister, there had sprung up a sentiment stronger than mere friendship.

But the war had called Will and his sister home. That dark and ugly cloud which had been the means of alienating so many friends and families of the North and South now intervened to put an end ostensibly to this warm friendship of the young schoolmates.

It was a sad moment when Will Prentiss and Jack Clark shook hands and parted, for each knew that the other was henceforth his foe.

Will Prentiss, upon arriving in Richmond, raised a company of Southern youths whom he called the Virginia Grays. His sister Nellie, whose spirit was of that kind which would not permit her to sit idly by and do nothing for her country in its extremity, became a spy and did valuable service in Washington.

Jack Clark, on the other hand, was named as captain of the Fairdale Blues, an organization of youths. His first lieutenant was Hal Martin, second lieutenant Walter Gray and first sergeant Joe Ward. All were boys of daring spirit and unquestioned loyalty. They were fighting for the Union and for what they believed was right.

In the Army of the Potomac they had first served with distinction. Then, by their own request, they were transferred to the West.

They fought at Donelson and at Shiloh, and we now find them at Holly Springs at the time when Pemberton, behind the Tallahatchie River, essayed to hinder the southward movement of Grant toward Vicksburg.

When Jack Clark reached the camp of the Blues he was received with enthusiasm as he stated the new order of General Grant.

Instantly the Blues began to break camp and prepare for the great expedition. Corporal Tom Peters, who was the wit of the boy company, was sent away post haste to carry General Grant's requisition for horses to the quartermaster-general.

"We will have a chance to see the country, boys," declared Jack. "You cannot find fault with that."

"No," cried Hal Martin enthusiastically. "It will give us a chance to win new laurels. I hope we can have the honor of rounding up old Forrest."

"So do I," said Jack. And this was the sentiment of all.

The Blues were soon in readiness. They had equipped themselves as lightly as possible.

Of course their tents had been left behind. They slung their muskets over their shoulders and were given sabres by the order which brought them the horses. Thus equipped they were briefly reviewed by their young captain.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEGRO'S STORY.

In less than an hour, as Jack Clark had predicted, the Blues, all mounted and equipped, reported to Colonel Gordon.

Enough more infantry had been mounted also to make up the necessary increase in his force demanded by the colonel.

The regular cavalry glanced askance at the mounted infantry, but the colonel's eye was upon them, and he forbade

any personal remarks to engender feeling. The entire troop rode out of Holly Springs shortly after the noon hour.

Jack was therefore surprised when Colonel Gordon rode up and said:

"Clark, I am going to send you ahead as advance guard and scouts. Keep a sharp lookout for an ambush. Report to me when you discover the enemy."

Jack saluted and replied:

"I will surely do so!"

The Blues dashed away, and it is safe to say that the regular cavalymen viewed this mark of special favor with anything but complaisance. But it was the colonel's orders.

Jack Clark and his company rode on rapidly for some miles. The country grew suddenly swampy and low and the roads became rough and muddy.

Jack Clark and his young lieutenant, Hal Martin, rode in advance. Their nerves were keen and their senses on the alert. They knew that at any moment they might encounter the enemy.

But as the hours went on and the miles sped by they saw no sign of the foe. When darkness began to shut down Jack drew rein at the verge of a vast tract of bottom land.

Just ahead a wooden bridge crossed a sluggish creek. An orderly had overtaken them with orders to bivouac.

Colonel Gordon's battalion was a mile in the rear and had gone into camp. Jack knew that this was not a desirable place to bivouac, but he must obey orders.

So the Blues dismounted. There was a little clearing, where the ground was practically dry, and here the Blues made their camp-fires. Soon they had collected piles of wood and had a blazing line of fires.

They heated their coffee and toasted their hard-tack in the best of spirits. Jack took the precaution to post an advanced line of pickets beyond the bridge.

The creek, he learned, was a tributary of the Tallahatchie, and they could therefore be not far from Pemberton's line.

Corporal Tom Peters was singing a lusty ballad. The boys in general joined in the chorus as they prepared the evening meal.

The horses were tethered in the woods nearby and a heavy guard placed over them. The scene was an enlivening one.

The lines of fires, the stacked muskets and the groups of soldier boys, engaged in eating and drinking, made a picture which an artist could hardly equal.

"You wait till we find old Forrest," cried one of the boys. "We'll hang him to the first tree."

"First catch your fox."

"Colonel Gordon will show you how to do that."

"It's not so easy. Forrest has fooled the best of our men. He always manages to wiggle out of a scrape."

Opinion was therefore divided as to the chances of catching the Confederate guerrilla. The boys now having finished their meal, gathered in a circle about the fires and began to sing patriotic songs.

Tom Peters having a fine tenor voice, led in this. Thus matters were going when suddenly to Jack Clark's ear came a startling hail:

"Sergeant of the guard! Post number six!"

In an instant the sergeant and his men were off to answer the call of the picket. Much interested to know who was asking admittance to the lines at that hour, Jack followed them.

He heard the sergeant ask:

"Who is there, picket?"

"It's a negro who wants to see our captain," was the reply.

At once Jack walked forward. He came into the light of the sergeant's lantern.

"I am here," he said. "Who wants to see me?"

"Here is the fellow, captain," cried the picket. "He says he has important information for you."

"Very good! I shall be glad to receive it. What is it, my man?"

The negro, a heavy-visaged, gigantic specimen, stood with respectful demeanor before the young captain.

"I'se done come to tell yo' somefin', Marse Yankee," he said. "Dere am a chaine to capture de Confederit kunnel ober to mah ole Massa Ballon's. Yo' jes' take some ob yo' men an' yo' done catch him fo' suah."

Jack was interested.

"What's your name, my man?"

"Mah name am Pete."

"Ah. Well, Pete, who is your master?"

"Ole Jephtha Ballon, ober to Sunrise Plantation. He kill dis chile if he knew I had tole yo' all about dis."

"You say there is a Confederate colonel at his house?"

"Yes, sah."

"Where is Sunrise Plantation?"

"Jes' about two miles ober here, sah. Jes' round de end ob de swamp. I done show yo' de way."

"Who is this colonel?"

"He am Kunnel Hank Maynard, sah! He am one ob General Forrest's best men. He done come up to see Marse Ballon an' neber know dat yo' Yankees was anywhars around yere."

"How did you know we were here?"

"Mah leetle boy Cuff, he come home wif de grist from de mill on a pony an' he see yo' marchin' down de Oxford road."

Jack saw that the negro was sincere and undoubtedly telling the truth. He hesitated but a moment.

If a Confederate colonel of General Forrest's command was thus within easy reach it would be foolish not to capture him. Perhaps from him some very important facts could be learned.

So Jack decided to act upon Pete's story.

"Pete," he said sharply, "is Forrest anywhere about here?"

"I dunno, sah. I done spec' he ain't far away, or Kunnel Maynard, he wouldn't be around yere."

Jack nodded comprehensively.

"I see," he said. "Is your master a large planter, Pete? Does he keep many plantation hands?"

"Yes, sah. He done keep forty slaves. He am a berry rich man."

"Ah! Of what does his family consist?"

"His family, sah?"

"Yes."

"Only jes' Miss Bess, sah. She am de only one lef' now. Ole missus died ober two years ago. But Miss Bess, she run de house jes' like she was ole enuff fo' to do it, sah."

"All right, Pete," said Jack. "You wait and I will go with you. Sergeant, call Corporal Peters and pick me out six good men."

"All right, captain."

A few moments later the fat little corporal came running down to the picket post. He was delighted at having been selected to go with the young captain.

In a few moments the six privates composing the guard had been selected and all was ready.

Jack went back for a moment to see Hal Martin, whom he left in command. Then he joined the little party.

"All right, Pete," he said to the negro. "You lead the way and I will follow."

"A'right, massa."

The negro darted away into the gloom and Jack and his boys followed. They proceeded along the edge of the swamp for a long distance.

Then the negro diverged and took a path which led into a dense scrub. Through this they pushed for a quarter of a mile and then came to an ascent.

Up this they proceeded and they came to a rail fence. Beyond this were fields. They had reached the plantation, it was quite evident.

Lights glimmering in the distance betokened the location of the home. The negro Pete now led the way more rapidly.

But when they had come to the line of negro cabins he halted:

"Marse captain, I kin go no further," he said. "Yo' jes' put yo' men around de house. Ole Marse Ballon and de kunnel am in de house drinkin' wine."

"All right, Pete," said Jack. "You may leave the rest to us. We will look after it all right. Forward, boys!"

When within a few yards of the house Jack paused in the shadows to take a look at it. He saw that it was a building much after the Southern type, with a wide, double-decked piazza.

He now ordered Corporal Peters to distribute his men cautiously about the house.

The slaves were all in their quarters, where they could be heard singing and dancing. The house seemed quiet. But lights burned in several rooms.

Jack now advanced boldly and stepped onto the piazza. The front door was open and he entered.

He stood in a fine old hall, supported with Corinthian columns, with a gallery above. From this hall doors opened into other rooms.

Jack stepped softly to one of these doors and looked into the room beyond. What he saw gave him a start.

He had heard voices and this was what guided him. He saw a long dining room, finely equipped with heavy sideboards and a long massive table.

At this table sat two men.

One of these wore a Confederate gray uniform. He had on his collar the silver stars of a colonel.

He was a man of rather a fierce type of countenance. His eyes were deep-set and piercing. Long hair fell down upon his coat collar.

Colonel Hank Maynard was a man known and feared throughout the South. He had figured in many a desperate encounter, but through all had managed to save his life.

He was considered one of the best riders and officers of Forrest's cavalry. Yet he now sat at the table of his friend, the planter, lolling in indolent ease and flushed with wine.

His friend, the planter, was fully as bad off. This exhibition of indulgence when so far as they knew the country was doomed to destruction, seemed in exceedingly bad taste.

Jack now studied Ballon. He was of the rich planter type, dressed in white trousers and high cravat. He drummed his fingers incessantly on the table.

Maynard had just filled his glass and, staggering to his feet, cried:

"Here is long life to Colonel Maynard. A braver man never lived. Here also is to Jephtha Ballon, the greatest and slipperiest of all the spies. Drink deep!"

CHAPTER III.

A FIGHT WITH SWORDS.

"Hold on," cried Ballon hotly. "I object to that!"

He was upon his feet in a moment. Rage and hate shone in his face. The two men glared at each other. Maynard's brain seemed to clear and his maudlin manner left him.

He bent forward and said in a sibilant tone of sarcasm:

"Ah! You resist the compliment!"

"That is not a compliment, sir! You intended it for an insult."

"Do you think it an insult to serve the Confederacy?"

"I consider it an insult to be accused of being a spy."

"Pshaw!" said Maynard contemptuously, placing a hand on the hilt of his sword. "You should not hide your light under a bushel. It is absurd. Who has carried all the important news of Sherman's advance to Pemberton but you?"

"That does not make me a spy. My information comes from my negroes, whom I have sent into the lines of the Union army."

Maynard laughed scornfully.

"You qualify the matter," he said. "If it pleases you, well and good. But the hour is late and I must ride back to my troop. I am sorry that you have seen fit to flame with anger at my words. But I can see that you, like me, have a Southern temper. I will pay my respects to your charming daughter and then I will go. Will you kindly order my horse?"

"Your horse shall be ordered, sir," replied the planter coldly. "It is not necessary to pay respects to my daughter."

The cavalry officer's brow grew dark.

"But it is my choice," he said.

"It is my choice that you do not."

"Will you state your reason?"

"No."

Maynard dropped a fierce imprecation. He brought his fist down upon the table with such a crash that the delicate whiskey glasses fell to the floor and were shattered.

"Now you insult me," he hissed. "You refuse me the honor of bidding adieu to your daughter. Do you demand that I leave the house?"

"In view of your uncivil conduct here, sir, I must request that you do."

For a moment the two men glared at each other. It was a remarkable transformation. A short while previous they had been engaged in pleasant converse, with the cheering whiskey bottle between them.

Now they were at swords' points. And this state of affairs could not be laid to the whiskey either.

Jack Clark, from the hall, watched the affair with interest.

But as he watched a new incident had presented itself. He heard a door open at the head of the long stairs.

He had just time to slip behind the dining room door, which opened outward into the hall, when a young girl, richly dressed, came down the stairs.

In the light of the Oriental lamp he beheld her and was almost spell-bound with her great beauty. So this was Bess Ballon, the planter's idolized daughter.

She had come down the stairs and appeared on the threshold of the dining room at the last words of her father, which commanded Colonel Maynard to leave the house.

Astonishment and pain showed in her fair face. The two men turned and were for an instant spell-bound. It was the planter who finally exclaimed:

"Bess, this is no place for you!"

"Father," exclaimed the young girl apprehensively, "what has happened?"

"Nothing, my child. Go back to your room. I am settling a little matter with Colonel Maynard."

But Bess saw the angry clouds upon the face of each, and her face grew pale. She hesitated.

Maynard had now recovered himself and stepped forward. His manner was gallant in the extreme.

"Ah, Miss Bess," he said ardently, "this is most opportune. It gives me that for which I have prayed—a chance——"

"Back, sir," said Ballon as he stepped between them. "Bess, go to your room. Colonel Maynard, you will oblige me by leaving this house at once."

The young girl started for the stairs. All were now within touching distance of Jack Clark, who stood behind the door.

Matters had been steadily nearing a dramatic climax. It now came.

As Bess Ballon moved toward the stairs Colonel Maynard sprung forward and caught her arm. He had the ardor of an impulsive lover.

"Stay, Bess," he cried. "We will not let this old dotard's foolish whims separate us. You shall remain; nay, more, I mean that you shall not leave me ever again. I want to tell you that I love you; that I ask you to be my wife."

Bess, with a frightened effort, freed her arm and sprung for the stairs. Her face was white and terrified:

"Stop, Colonel Maynard," she cried. "You forget yourself! The wine has maddened you!"

"Never!" cried the colonel. "I mean what I say——"

"You hound!" gritted the planter as he sprung before Maynard. "You have added injury to insult in this house. Now go, or I'll have you forcibly ejected."

Maynard stepped back and folded his arms. There was a dangerous light in his eyes.

"You dare not do that," he said. "I have men within call. I can pull your house down about your ears."

"This will cost you your commission. I will report you to Congress——"

"Bah!" exclaimed Maynard, snapping his finger contemptuously. "That does not intimidate me in the least. You forget that my commission is not regular. We owe no absolute allegiance to any government during this war. We are guerrillas, and we make reprisals wherever we choose. If we raid your place and burn your house about your ears there is no punishment for us. We can assert that you were a traitor and helped the Yankees. You see how helpless you are. Now, my pretty one, I want a word with you——"

Maynard had started toward Bess on the stairs. She screamed and Ballon flung himself forward and hurled the cowardly cavalryman back.

Fury and hate flashed from Maynard's eyes, and he whipped out his sword. Murder was in his face, and he would have struck down the unarmed planter.

But as his sword swung in air it clashed against another blade.

From his concealment Jack Clark had stepped forth, and his sword parried the blow meant for Ballon. It is hardly necessary to say that the villain was most astonished and startled.

He sprung back and faced the young Union captain. But Ballon and his daughter were equally surprised. For a moment there was a startling tableau.

Jack Clark's action had certainly saved the life of the planter.

Ballon, white and amazed, stared at Jack as if he was a ghost. Bess clung to the stair railing with a sudden heightening of color, her gaze fixed in a startled manner upon the young captain.

It was some seconds before Maynard could recover sufficiently to speak. Then he shook his sword and yelled:

"What's this? A Yankee officer in this house? Treachery!"

"I am alone responsible for being here at this moment," said Jack coolly. "I could not stand by and see murder done."

"Who—who are you?" asked Ballon. "What has brought you here?"

"I am Captain Jack Clark, of the Fairdale Blues. I am here to capture Colonel Maynard."

"The deuce you are!" gritted Maynard fiercely. "It's a hard task you will have, I can tell you that."

"Perhaps so," said Jack quietly. "But I can assure you that you will leave this house only as my prisoner!"

"Indeed!" sneered Maynard. "How do you propose to do that alone?"

"I am not alone, sir. At a signal my men will be here."

"At a signal I can also bring my men here," said Maynard. "They are waiting outside. How shall we decide which of us is to go with the other?"

"It is already decided," said Jack. "I demand that you surrender!"

"I demand the same thing of you!"

"Gentlemen," said Ballon, who had now recovered himself, "there seems to be a division of opinion here. As a true Confederate sympathizer I would ordinarily seek to encompass the defeat of the Union foe, but in this case I find a foe on either side and I am constrained to side with the lesser of two evils. Captain, I am ready to assist you to capture this fellow."

"Traitor!" hissed Maynard. "You are what I thought you were. I'll have your life for this!"

He surged forward, but again Jack's sword crossed his. Maddened, the Confederate colonel lunged viciously at the boy captain.

Jack Clark was clever with the sword. He had made a study of the art of fencing, and was quite expert at it. Maynard was himself a clever swordsman.

Instinctively Jack parried the thrust. Then the duel was on.

Neither thought of calling for assistance. It was a matter of a personal sort, and to be settled only by the sword. Jack was not at all loath to accept the gage.

Ballon had gone to the door to call his servants. Bess had retreated half way up the stairs, though she remained there bound by a sort of strange fascination.

And the two officers fought for the mastery. The colonel against the captain, the heavy man against the lithe and alert youth.

It would have seemed an unequal contest, and as if the advantage should be with the colonel.

But Jack Clark, though not as strong, was more dextrous and avoided the fierce rushes of his heavier opponent.

Up and down, right and left, played the sword blades. Around and around the room they went fighting savagely.

The clash of the steel made ringing music in the hall of that Southern mansion. Ballon, the planter, clung to the door jamb and watched the contest with white face and open mouth. On the stairs still crouched beautiful Bess, the color coming and going in her face.

Jack had twice gone under the guard of the Confederate colonel and pricked him, once in the shoulder and once in the cheek.

The blood flowed, but the reach had been too short. Moreover, the boy captain sought rather to disable than to kill his antagonist. He wanted to capture him alive.

Savage imprecations were uttered by Maynard as he again and again tried to break down Jack's guard.

It seemed to have come down to a question of endurance. At this the advantage was wholly with the young captain.

Jack was cool and self-possessed.

The colonel was puffing and perspiring, and his wrist was losing strength. Suddenly he gathered all his strength and made a terrific blow at his foe.

Jack caught the other's blade dextrously, there was a ringing snap and the steel went flying across the room and struck the dado. With only the hilt in his hand and chalk white with terror Maynard stood helpless and unarmed, at the mercy of his young antagonist.

CHAPTER IV.

A DARING ESCAPE.

The blade of Maynard's sword had snapped right at the hilt. He was thus disarmed and helpless.

Jack Clark could have cut him down. But the boy captain stepped back and his sword slipped into its sheath.

"I don't want your life, sir," he said, "though you will admit that it belongs to me. I only ask you to surrender."

Maynard for a moment did not speak. His crafty and hunted gaze roamed about as if seeking a way to escape.

But Jack said coolly:

"You cannot escape. You are surrounded by my men."

At the same moment he blew a whistle. In an instant heavy feet sounded on the piazza and into the hall burst Corporal Peters and two of the Blues.

The corporal saluted and glanced at the inmates of the place. Jack Clark pointed to Maynard and said:

"There is our man. Take him!"

The Blues instantly advanced upon Maynard. He dropped the useless sword hilt, and, white to the lips, said:

"I surrender as a prisoner of war subject to exchange."

"Do you?" exclaimed Ballon sarcastically. "A few moments ago you admitted that you were a guerrilla."

"You lie!" hissed the villain. But Jack Clark put up his hand.

"Silence!" he commanded. "Take the prisoner away, corporal!"

Maynard was marched out into the night. Jack turned to the planter and his daughter and said:

"My errand is accomplished here, sir. I trust you will pardon this intrusion, but the exigencies of war demanded it."

"Indeed, sir," cried Ballon. "We owe you more than words can express. I believe that scoundrel would have killed me."

Bess Ballon had come down the stairs and now stood with heightened color and eager gaze before Jack.

"I want to thank you for what you have done," she said. "You saved my dear father's life. Can I believe that all Yankees are as brave and chivalrous as you? If so, then your people have been greatly misrepresented to us."

Jack smiled and bowed.

"I am but a very humble type of our men of the North," he said. "We never fail to accept every chance to serve your sex."

Bess blushed prettily.

"You know how to say gallant things," she replied. "But you will not make a prisoner of my father?"

"Your father? Certainly not! Why should I make a prisoner of him?"

"He is a Confederate sympathizer."

"There are thousands like him, but we do not make war on such. He is simply a non-combatant. He does not wear a uniform."

Ballon's face showed his relief, as did that of his daughter.

"Sir, I thank you," said the planter in a trembling voice. "You are a true man, if you are a Yankee. Is your company encamped near?"

"Not more than two miles away."

"Then I beg you will accept the hospitality of this mansion. You are welcome here indefinitely."

"I thank you very much," replied Jack courteously, "but I cannot accept your kindness. I must return to my company. We are in the enemy's country, and at any moment Forrest and his men might descend upon us."

The planter gave a start. He hesitated a moment and then said:

"I am going to tell you, in return for the service you have done me, that you are in great danger here. Forrest's camp is not two miles to the west. Maynard had a body guard stationed outside here."

"We saw nothing of them."

"Perhaps your coming frightened them away. If so, then they may carry the news to Forrest."

"Ah," said Jack with a smile. "You will understand then why I cannot at present accept your hospitality."

"I trust you may be able to do so later," said Bess. Her eyes met the young captain's, and her gaze fell before his.

Jack felt a queer thrill. He thought he had never in his life seen such wonderful eyes.

"I certainly hope that it will be my exceeding good fortune," he replied. He would have said more, but just at that moment a startling thing happened.

The sharp report of a musket sounded outside. It was followed by another and another. Jack Clark turned and dashed from the house.

When he sprung out into the darkness it was to run into one of his men.

"Captain, we are attacked," he cried. "The corporal sent me for you. They are below here in the road."

Jack sprung away, followed by the speaker. Down through the lane they dashed, and he now saw the flash of the muskets. In a few moments he had reached the spot where Peters and three of the Blues were ensconced behind a rail fence firing and loading as fast as they could.

With horror and grief, Jack found that two of the Blues had been shot by the Confederates, who were creeping out of the swamp a few hundred yards away.

The prisoner Maynard was sitting with his back to the fence, and where he could make no attempt to escape.

"They are too many for us, captain," said Peters. "I think we had better get out as soon as we can."

"Very well, corporal," said Jack calmly. "Fall back with the prisoner slowly. Keep just under this little ridge of land. As soon as we reach the scrub over there we can slip them."

This order was skilfully executed. The little party reached the scrub and now began to fall back at the double-quick.

They ran rapidly through the scrub and soon came to the swamp line. They had evidently given the enemy the slip, for they now saw nothing more of them.

Jack was able to find his way along the swamp line easily enough. Half an hour later they saw the glimmer of the camp-fires of the Blues.

A few moments later they were hailed by the outer line of picket guard and soon were back in camp. Maynard was with them.

It is hardly necessary to say that the Blues were overjoyed at the return of their young captain and interested in the capture of the Confederate colonel.

"You certainly did well, Jack," cried Hal Martin. "I have worried about you ever since you left."

"You need not have done that," said Jack with a laugh. "A bad penny always returns. But I tell you, getting that prisoner was like snatching a hot coal from a fire."

And with this Jack told the story of their experiences at Sunrise Plantation. Hal listened with deepest interest.

"We ought to hang this fellow," he said. "If he ever gets his freedom he will make life miserable for that old planter and his daughter."

"Indeed, I believe you," said Jack. "But I shall not hang him, for all that."

"What will you do with him?"

"Send him back to Colonel Gordon, who can do with him as he pleases."

"Of course, that's our only way."

"So far as I can see it is!"

"But is not our position here a bit dangerous at the present moment? What could we do if Forrest should happen to locate us?"

"There is the danger we must face," said Jack. "We know that Forrest is encamped only two miles beyond Sunrise Plantation. That is therefore only four miles from here. If the planter Ballou does not betray us Forrest will never dream that Gordon and his battalion are so near. It would be an easy matter to surround and surprise him between now and morning."

"Grand!" cried Hal. "Nothing could be better. Give me a horse and I will ride back and acquaint Gordon with all the facts."

"Very good," agreed Jack. "At the same time take the prisoner with you."

"Of course!"

It did not take Hal long to get his horse and select a body guard. Hewas quickly in saddle.

Maynard, the prisoner, was placed in the midst of the little cavalcade. Then they galloped away.

Into the darkness they rode at full speed. The young lieutenant thought only of carrying the news of the proximity of Forrest to Gordon.

It looked indeed feasible for a surprise attack upon the Confederate commander of guerrillas.

All depended, however, upon a quick move, for daylight would thwart the whole plan. Hal spurred his horse on rapidly.

Maynard, the prisoner, rode silently in their midst. His arms were bound behind him, and to all appearances and belief he was helpless.

But, unknown to the little party, in the darkness he had worked assiduously at his bonds until he was able to free his hands.

The cavalcade was just crossing a small bridge over a creek, and the lights of Gordon's camp were in sight when a thrilling thing happened.

Maynard's horse swerved and collided with that of the rider on his right. Quick as a flash the Confederate colonel's arm swept the rider from his saddle and this opened an avenue of escape on that side.

The other guards were so astonished at the startling move that they were unable to realize it until it was all over.

Maynard had shot away into the oak forest and vanished in the gloom like a dark shadow.

"After him!" yelled Hal Martin. "Fire at him!"

Shots were sent after the Confederate colonel. But they might as well have been spared.

In the oaks he was safe from the glancing bullets. Chagrined and dismayed, Hal and his men went in hot pursuit.

But after an hour of fruitless quest they were compelled to abandon it.

"No use," said one of the Blues, pulling up his reeking horse. "That fellow has slipped us."

"So he has," said Hal, deeply disgruntled. "I wouldn't have believed it possible. Well, we must carry word to Colonel Gordon at once or the plan to surprise Forrest cannot be executed."

Hal realized that much time had been lost in the vexatious chase of Maynard. Indeed he feared that it was even now too late to carry out the plan to surround Forrest.

There was no doubt but that Maynard would ride to rejoin the guerrilla chief at once, and he would carry warning of Gordon's proximity and purpose.

It was a most dismaying reflection that the escape of Maynard had unhinged all plans.

CHAPTER V.

THE BLUES RETREAT.

It need hardly be said that Hal lost no further time. He set out at once to ride to Colonel Gordon's camp.

Over an hour had been lost.

The little party rode on as fast as they could. Soon the lights of the camp were again in sight.

Hal drew up his horse with the hail of the picket.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"A friend!" replied Hal. "Call the sergeant of the guard at once. I must be taken to Colonel Gordon instantly. It is a very important matter."

"Sergeant of the guard! Post number eight!" bawled the picket.

In a few moments the sergeant and guard appeared on the spot. He recognized Hal at once.

"What's the matter, lieutenant?" he asked.

"I must see Colonel Gordon. We have found Forrest!"

"The deuce!" cried the sergeant. "That is good news. Colonel Gordon is at this moment in his tent asleep. I will take you to the adjutant."

Hal was received by the colonel's adjutant, who listened to his story with some excitement. He at once aroused Gordon.

For some reason or other the leader of the expedition was out of sorts when aroused. He listened to Hal's story, and with a shrug of his shoulders growled:

"You citizen soldiers make me weary. What is the use of a wild attempt to surprise Forrest eight miles away in a country of which we know nothing and in the dark. We would run into some swamp hole and be wiped out."

Hal was astounded. He could hardly believe his senses.

He had felt confident that Gordon would be only too eager to adopt this plan of Jack Clark's to entrap the guerilla chief.

He did not realize at the moment the fact that a superior officer is foolishly averse at times to adopting the suggestions of one inferior in rank.

Jealousy between military leaders has led to more defeats in battle than any other cause. The reluctance to help another general win fame and a great victory is the great explanation of the loss of many a battle.

And this action upon the part of Gordon may have thwarted the capture of Forrest and his men, thereby failing to eliminate from the game of war one of its greatest factors. The history of the war in that part of the Union might have been far different.

"But Captain Clark feels sure that if you will advance with your whole force you can capture Forrest," said Hal.

"Ah, he does, eh?" snapped the peppery colonel. "Well, my orders to him is to remain where he is. To-morrow, when we can see what we are doing, I will take measures to entrap the foe."

Hal saluted and said:

"Have you further orders, sir?"

"No, sir! Go back to your captain and tell him what I say."

Chagrined and disappointed, Hal left the tent. In a few moments he was again mounted and riding out of the camp with his men.

They gave full rein to their horses.

They passed the spot where Maynard had given them the

slip. On they galloped until finally the glimmer of the camp-fires of the Blues could be seen.

Hal passed the picket and threw himself from his horse in the centre of the camp. He faced Jack Clark, who asked:

"Well, what have you to say? Is Colonel Gordon coming?"

"Coming?" repeated Hal, with a grating laugh. "I should say not!"

"What?" gasped Jack. "He will not come? Did you state all to him?"

"I did! It is a pity that he could not have personally become cognizant of Forrest's position instead of having to receive it from us."

Hal spoke significantly, and in a flash Jack comprehended. A flush suffused the boy captain's face.

"Do you think so, Hal?"

"I know it."

"I am sorry, for I think that Forrest, the fox, could be cornered. It would be the greatest accomplishment of the war. I wish I had been there. I would have assured him that all the credit should be resigned to him."

The indignation of the Blues when this apparent explanation of Gordon's conduct spread among them was most intense. Jack exclaimed:

"I wish we had a few more men. I would be tempted to essay the feat alone."

"As it is, it looks as if we are to be the ones attacked," said Hal.

"How so?"

"Why, Maynard will certainly carry word to Forrest, and he will endeavor to gather us in. I would not be surprised if we were attacked before morning."

"You are right," agreed Jack.

"Perhaps we had better fall back to make sure that we are not cut off."

"By no means," said the boy captain. "If we are attacked we will make a stand and Gordon must move up to assist us."

Hal shrugged his shoulders.

"He may not have sufficient interest."

"Ah, that can't be! Jealousy or no jealousy, he can't afford to see any part of his command cut off and annihilated. He would have to come to our rescue."

"Well, I hope he will, for if we remain here, I know that he will be called upon to do so before morning."

It was not a comfortable thought for Jack Clark. The escape of Maynard was certainly a most unfortunate event.

However, there was nothing to be done but to await events. Jack could hardly realize that Gordon would suffer the chance to attack Forrest to go by.

The young captain, however, had no idea of being caught napping himself, so he posted even another line of pickets and adopted every precaution against a surprise.

The hours passed, and Jack, though he rolled himself up in his blanket by the fire, could not sleep.

He was constantly on the alert, for he could not rid himself of the belief that they must be attacked before morning. However, this did not happen.

But just as the gray light of dawn was breaking a startling sound came from the east, or the direction of Gordon's camp.

It was the report of firearms. Soon the firing grew heavy.

A vidette came galloping in with a thrilling report.

"The enemy are between us and Gordon's camp. They have attacked him and are having a hot fight."

Instantly Jack gave his orders. The Blues turned out of their blankets instantly and fell into line quickly.

The horses were brought up and they mounted. Jack sprang into saddle, and at their head dashed toward the distant scene of conflict.

The boy captain at once diagnosed the case.

The wily Forrest had not deigned to attempt the cutting off of the Blues. His game had been to surround and attack Gordon. He was after big game.

And the young captain had strong misgivings that Forrest might succeed, for he knew that he was a more able strategist than Gordon.

Jack's duty now was to lend his superior officer all the assistance in his power. But in doing so he had no idea of putting his command in such a position that it would be in danger of being uselessly sacrificed.

The Blues had hardly advanced half a mile before they met a line of fire. At once they dismounted and opened fire.

The firing grew hot and Jack soon found that he was facing a much larger force. He knew that a fierce battle was going on at Gordon's camp.

But now he found that the overwhelming force in front of him necessitated a retreat. He fell back slowly.

To his surprise the foe kept coming. He had at first assumed it only a part of Forrest's rear guard. But, however this might be, the foe seemed intent upon pursuing the Blues.

A shiver came over Jack as he reflected upon the possibility of another line of foes in his rear. But fortunately this fear was groundless. They did not materialize.

Suddenly from the woods on the right of the Blues a large force of cavalry emerged. They were about to make a charge.

Jack saw at once that it would be madness to attempt to face them in their present position. So he gave the order to mount.

The Blues obeyed quickly, and then galloped away swiftly. The guerrillas, with fierce yells, gave pursuit.

Half a mile to the north the ground was high. A small hill rose to a height of a few hundred feet, and Jack headed for this. He saw that it was rocky and would afford a good shelter for his boys.

The horses of the Confederates were not as good as those of the Blues, and very soon quite a good distance was opened up between them.

Nearer they drew to the hill. Soon they had reached its base and now Jack gave the order to halt.

The Blues obeyed, and as their horses were led away up the hillside and among the ledges they deployed in line of battle.

As the pursuing Confederates came nearer Jack gave the order:

"Give it to 'em, boys! Make every shot tell! Fire!"

The order was obeyed. Fire leaped from the muzzles of the muskets of the mounted infantry. The volley emptied the saddles of many of the foe.

They wavered and now swept to one side, coming to a halt and dismounting themselves.

The character of the ground would not admit of such a thing as a mounted attack. They were compelled to fight on the ground. And at this game the Blues had the advantage.

The hill which they were now on was peculiarly adapted for defence. It was very rocky and afforded splendid cover for the marksmen.

As the Confederates advanced the Blues fell back up the hill in good order, keeping themselves well shielded by the rocks.

Occasionally one of the boys would be shot. But where one was killed ten of the Confederates fell.

This made the contest an even one, for the Confederates outnumbered the Blues fully ten to one. So the fight went on furiously.

And from their position the Blues could plainly see the position of Gordon.

The cavalry colonel had concentrated his men behind hastily thrown up intrenchments. He was making a most desperate stand.

Forrest and his men had repeatedly charged, only to meet with repulse. Each time they had been hurled back. They were now content to maintain the conflict at long range.

CHAPTER VI.

COLONEL GORDON'S MESSAGE.

Jack saw that there was little doubt that Gordon could hold Forrest at bay so long as his ammunition and his rations held out.

It was simply a question of supplies. Of course these were not large, for the mobile character of a cavalry company forbids the carrying of wagons.

So that unless beaten off or unless help came, Gordon would be forced to succumb. It might be possible for him to hold out two or three days.

Thus matters looked to Jack Clark. And after events proved that his assumption was correct.

"Well, pard," cried Hal Martin as he joined Jack, "what do you think of the outlook?"

"We're all right. We could whip a good many more than we are holding now. But it certainly looks bad for the colonel."

"So it does."

"I am afraid he is in for a bad beating unless he gets help."

"It certainly seems likely."

"I say, Hal!"

"Well?"

"This comes of waiting for the foe to come to you. If we had gone after Forrest and surprised him in his camp there would have been a different story to tell now."

"I believe you, Jack."

"It is really too bad."

"So it is."

"As it is, we have a little the best of the argument. We can pull out and save ourselves. But they are surrounded."

This was apparently true. The expedition had so far been ill-starred. It looked as if Gordon was already defeated.

Just then, at the right of the Confederate line, a man was seen to rise from behind a rock with a white cloth tied on a stick.

He waved it above his head and advanced up the hillside. Of course none of the Blues fired on him.

"A flag of truce!" cried Hal. "It can't be that they mean to surrender."

"They? Not much," replied Jack, "but see, they are firing on their own truce-bearer."

This startling fact was apparent. Bullets shattered the stick in his hand and pierced the cloth. A bullet swept his hat from his head.

He ran rapidly and tumbled down behind some rocks at the foot of the hill. It was a matter of a puzzling sort to some of the boys.

But Jack exclaimed comprehensively:

"He is probably a Union sympathizer, trying to desert to our lines."

"That is good," cried Hal. "Let us take him in."

"He will soon be here. They can't hit him now, I'm sure."

This was quite apparent.

The best efforts of the Confederate marksmen were in vain. This was strange when it was remembered that they were usually the best shots in the country.

But now it was seen that the truce-bearer did not wear a uniform of gray, but of blue. He was apparently a Union soldier.

This seemed to explain the use of the white flag, which was to avoid being shot by his own countrymen. Once inside the lines, he would be all right.

Jack gave orders not to fire upon him, and the stranger was allowed to come up among the Blues.

He was exhausted and white as chalk. He sank down breathless. It was some moments before he recovered.

Then, as the boy captain bent down over him, he asked:

"Are you Captain Jack Clark?"

"I am," replied Jack.

"Well, I'm from Colonel Chester Gordon. He sends his compliments and this letter."

The plucky messenger handed a white envelope to Jack. The young captain took it and read as follows:

"TO CAPTAIN CLARK:

"If this reaches you, you are to at once mount your company and ride for reinforcements from the nearest quarter.

Do not spare your horses. At any cost you must bring us aid. We may be able to hold out three days. All depends upon our ammunition. The fate of this battalion depends upon you, for we are surrounded. I think you will get aid sooner by riding west to meet Washburne's advance guard. I entrust this to my best scout, hoping that he may get through the enemy's lines and reach you. Do not fail me."

"Yours, CHESTER GORDON, Colonel Commanding."

Jack Clark read this communication with varied emotions. He handed it to Hal Martin.

The young lieutenant read it and seemed to be deeply impressed. He handed the message back and said:

"I am afraid it's all up with Gordon."

"No," said Jack resolutely. "We've got to get reinforcements."

"Do you see any way to do it?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Simply follow out his instructions. We must ride west to find the advance guard of Washburne. They may be near at hand. The presence of Forrest in this vicinity makes me think it is so. It is of no use to go back to Holly Springs. There are no reinforcements there, even if we succeeded in reaching there. We have no alternative."

"Do you believe that?"

"I do."

"Then," cried Hal. "Let us start at once."

"Very true. But it does not look easy."

This was true. The foe had now formed a line about three sides of the hill. They had not quite men enough to completely surround it.

There was but one chance that looked at all logical. This was to make a dash and break through their line to the west.

The line was apparently thin there. A bold dash might force a way through. Then the Blues might trust to their horses to escape.

They did not believe that a resolute pursuit would be organized. Once clear of the foe, they could ride hard to meet the advance of Washburne.

At once Jack gave the order.

The Blues fell back quickly, and with a heavy ledge and a heap of boulders for a screen they mounted.

"Attention, company!" shouted Jack. "Draw sabres! Quick trot! Forward!"

The little troop swung out and down the hillside at full speed. Before the Confederates could gather any idea of their purpose they had swept down and into their line.

With a wild cheer and sabres flashing, the Blues struck their line. Muskets cracked, swords swept the air and the troop cut their way clean through and dashed away to the west.

The Confederates rushed to saddle and essayed a pursuit. But the Blues had a long start.

As the little company rode on they kept up a desultory fire over their shoulders. Soon they left their pursuers behind.

They had distanced them, and any further danger from them was obviated. But the Blues continued to ride.

Just ahead, though, Jack saw the guidon of a cavalry regiment. This led him to change his course more to the south.

This took him about the lower edge of the swamp, where they had bivouacked. He realized with a thrill that this was past the plantation home of Jephtha Ballon.

Jack recalled to mind the rare beauty of Bess Ballon. He wondered if she was yet there, or had she sought a place of greater safety. It was not long before the plantation house came into view. Seen in the daytime, it was even grander than Jack had thought it in his visit of the night before.

The young captain's critical gaze took in everything about the place. He saw two figures on the broad porch.

Instinctively he raised his field glass to his eyes, and they were revealed to him plainly. Ballon, the planter, stood on the porch and beside him was Bess.

Jack Clark felt a queer thrill. He wondered if they were seen by the two on the porch. He was half tempted to ride down to the plantation.

But he recalled the fact that stern duty forbade this. He must procure the reinforcements for the relief of Colonel Gordon.

So it is certain that the Blues would have gone on past Sunrise Plantation but for an unexpected development.

Down over a hillside in the distance a troop of horse was seen galloping. They were easily recognized even at that distance as Confederate guerrillas.

For a moment Jack fancied that they were a detachment sent by Forrest to head him off.

In that event there would certainly be a collision, for it was certain that Jack Clark would not change his course again, at least not to escape an encounter with the foe on even terms.

But suddenly the troop of guerrillas began to bear down for the plantation. Then Jack beheld a surprising sight.

From all parts of the plantation armed negroes flocked to the house. There were a few white men with them, probably overseers. They were seen to be employed in barricading the porch.

"Ah! that's queer!" muttered the young captain. "It looks as if they expected an attack from us. They need not fear!"

But a moment later it became evident to Jack Clark that this was not the case. It was the other troop of horse which the defenders of the plantation were making ready for.

For already the negroes had opened fire upon them. Jack put his glass again to his eyes and gave an exclamation of surprise.

The tall figure riding at the head of the troop was easily recognized as Colonel Hank Maynard. He was coming back to the plantation for reprisal and revenge beyond a doubt.

"What does that mean, Jack?" asked Hal Martin, as he dashed up. "It looks as if there was going to be trouble down there."

"There certainly is," replied Jack. "That is Maynard himself leading those men."

Hal gave a sharp cry.

"He has come back to revenge himself upon the planter and his daughter."

"That is evident."

"The dark scoundrel! We ought to take a hand in that, Jack."

The young captain did not for a moment make reply. He was struggling between a sense of duty and a powerful desire to right a wrong.

He knew that he ought not to waste time here while Gordon and his brave men were so hard-pressed and depending upon him to reach Washburne's advance guard and get reinforcements.

Yet Jack could not bear the thought of seeing the plantation burned and the young girl abducted, for this was no doubt Maynard's purpose.

Hal seemed to read his young captain's thoughts, for he said:

"Deuced hard thing to decide, isn't it, Jack? What can we do?"

CHAPTER VII.

VILLAINY AFOOT.

"We are under strict orders to waste no time," said Jack, "but this is a case which would seem to justify it."

"You are right, Jack. We can't see those people murdered! I believe that Maynard means to destroy the plantation and carry off the planter's daughter."

"That is his purpose!"

"Then we would be cowards to stand by and see that done. We must not do it. It ought not to take long to drive him back. If we can capture him I am wholly in favor of hanging him."

"There is no doubt he deserves it," said Jack irresolutely. "I hardly know what to do. I will ask the boys."

Jack wheeled his horse and cried:

"Attention, company! You all know the work we have before us. We are ordered to make a hard ride to secure reinforcements for Colonel Gordon, who is hard pressed by Forrest. Down yonder we see a detachment of his guerrillas, led by Hank Maynard, who are about to attack and destroy the plantation home of Jephtha Ballon. The principal object of Maynard is to abduct the daughter of the planter. Shall we pass on or shall we disobey orders and pause long enough to beat Maynard back and thwart him in his rascally game?"

For a moment there was silence. Then one of the Blues cried:

"Stop and set matters right here. We can ride harder to make up for it."

A rousing cheer went up on the air at this declaration. Jack saw that the Blues were on the right side.

"It shall be so," he cried. "The loss of an hour cannot

altogether defeat our purpose. Gordon will hold out. All right! Forward, boys! Fours right! Gallop!"

The Blues sped down through the fields toward the plantation. But Jack saw that they would be too late.

Maynard's men had already reached the plantation yard and opened fire. The negroes who had been massed by Ballon to defend the plantation were swept away like chaff.

The guerrillas swarmed down into the yard. In an instant torches were seen being ignited. It would be but a few moments when the plantation buildings would be in flames.

Jack saw Maynard and two of his men rush into the house. Ballon was made a prisoner instantly.

Jack knew that Maynard had gone into the house after Bess. His blood tingled and he spurred his horse at the rail fence and leaped it.

The Blues had come up on the flank of the guerrillas and at once a terrific hand-to-hand fight ensued.

Sabres swung in air, pistols flashed and the battle was a hot one. The Confederates fell back in confusion and the Blues drove them back into the lane.

But Jack Clark, followed by Peters, had sprung down and rushed into the house after Maynard.

As Jack entered the grand old hall he heard a feminine shriek. With hot veins he rushed into the richly-furnished parlor.

He saw two of the guerrillas trying to bind the wrists of the struggling girl, while Maynard stood by evilly exultant.

"Tie her up, boys! She's my game now!" he was crying. But the next moment Jack Clark bounded into the room.

What followed was most thrilling. Maynard turned and saw the young Union officer and his face grew white. He had not forgotten his previous meeting with him.

"You?" he yelled. "You here? What does this mean? What do you want?"

"You!" cried Jack, placing his sword at his throat. "Unhand that young woman. Call off those hounds or I will kill them and you also!"

For a moment Maynard's face grew an apoplectic red. He gasped and tried to reach for his sword. But Jack's eye held him.

"Let her go, boys!" he said harshly. "Confound you, sir! I'll get even with you!"

Peters had stood ready to cut the two guerrillas down with his sword. The young girl, with a wild cry of joy, rushed to Jack's side for protection.

"Now, you vile scoundrel!" said Jack tensely, "you are my prisoner, and I shall see that you adorn the branch of the nearest tree."

"You will, eh?" gritted Maynard. "I don't believe it! Just consider that my men surround this place!"

"My men are cutting them to pieces out there," retorted Jack. "Surrender or I'll run you through!"

Maynard was a coward and would no doubt have yielded but for an unlooked for incident.

Just then into the room from the rear of the house burst a dozen of the guerrillas. They halted an instant, but Maynard gave a yell:

"Help, men! Cut him down! Come to my rescue!"

For a moment Jack Clark's hand wavered. It was a temptation to run the wretch through. But some impulse restrained him. The next moment it was too late.

One of the guerrillas, swift as thought, hurled his canteen at Jack. None of them had loaded guns or pistols, else he might have been shot.

But the flying canteen struck the young captain full on the head. For one brief instant he was stunned, and his sword point dropped.

Maynard darted back like a flash and yelled:

"At him, boys! Kill him! Shoot him!"

But the gun locks clicked harmlessly, for they had not reloaded their weapons. Several pulled out their ramrods to do so. But Tom Peters drew his pistol and fired, bringing one of them down. Then he threw himself before Jack, crying:

"Run, captain! Take the girl! I'll hold 'em off!"

But Jack, having now recovered, saw a plan which quick as a flash he accepted. He threw one arm about the waist of Bess and sprung through the parlor doorway.

"Quick, Peters!" he shouted. "Get out here lively! Shut the door!"

The door was of the heavy oaken pattern. It had a bolt on the outer side. Peters was after his young captain fully as quick.

They slammed the door just as enraged Maynard and his men came crashing against it. It was strong enough to resist their first rush.

But Jack did not pause when this brief barrier was secured. He caught Bess up in his arms and quickly passed out onto the porch.

"Mount your horse, Peters," he shouted. "Miss Ballon, I ask you to be brave. I will yet get you safely out of this if you will bear up."

"Captain Clark, I am not afraid," replied the young girl; "I am ready to do anything you ask of me."

"I want you to mount behind me. I am afraid we must ride for it. I see my men are far away down the lane fighting the guerrillas. Maynard will get out of the house in a few moments and we might be overwhelmed."

"Do not fear, Captain Clark," assured Bess. "I will ride with you."

Jack sprung into saddle and assisted the young girl to mount behind him. Tom Peters cried in alarm:

"We are cut off, captain! Our boys are away down the lane. There comes another detachment over the hill. They are all around us."

It required but a glance for Jack Clark to see this. He bit his lip and then bent forward in his saddle.

A road led out from the plantation around an old barn. There was a hill over which the foe were riding to reinforce Maynard's men.

Jack saw that if he could gain the highway by the barn before them he could skirt the field below and rejoin his own men.

On the other hand, if he failed they would capture him. It seemed the only course to pursue.

They certainly could not remain longer where they were. Guerrillas were all around them, and Maynard was just bursting out of the house.

"Cut them off! Shoot them!" he yelled to his men. "Don't let 'em escape!"

Bullets whistled about them. But Jack Clark bent forward and put spurs to his horse. Peters followed.

Down the lane they went. They must pass the old barn before the advancing foe could cut them off. It was a thrilling attempt. All manner of dangers sprung up in their path. Peters behind Jack was firing at some troopers who had appeared from behind the barn.

The Confederate cavalry were riding to head them off on the left, while a dismounted trooper ran alongside and aimed a pistol at them.

Jack swung his sword aloft and cried:

"Hang on, Bess! They'll never take us alive!"

Then Jack, dodging the pistol ball, made a downward stroke at the trooper as he passed and wounded him in the arm.

Down into the highway they now dashed, leaving the foe behind. Not a quarter of a mile distant the Blues had driven Maynard's detachment to a stand in a clump of timber.

Jack rode down and joined them now. A hot fire was being kept up with the foe.

Jack dismounted and assisted Bess to do the same. He first gave quick orders to his men to fall back toward the plantation.

"I have pulled you out of that scrape, Miss Ballon," he said. "But I fear I cannot save the plantation buildings. I see they have already fired them."

This was true. Flames were leaping skyward, and it was plain that the buildings were doomed.

What was more, Jack saw that the foe outnumbered the Blues, and to engage them on even ground would be folly.

"Captain Clark, I am deeply indebted to you," said the young Southern girl, and he saw that her eyes were wet with tears. "You have saved me from a horrible fate. It is hard to see the old plantation home go, but this is a time of war and many must suffer. I could ask but for one thing more, and that is that I may be assured of my father's safety."

"I think they took him prisoner," said Jack. "Perhaps we can effect his rescue."

But Tom Peters, who had stood near by, now stepped forward and removed his cap.

"Captain Clark," he said in a low tone, "it may be best for the young lady to know the worst now."

Bess turned with a sharp, deeply drawn breath. Her face was white.

"I can bear it," she said. "Let me know the truth. It is better than suspense."

"Well, miss, when I went into the house with Captain Clark, I had just come from the yard in the rear. I saw them hang a man from one of the trees. It was——"

"My father!" she hoarsely cried. "Oh, heavens be merciful! My father!"

She leaned against the horse for a moment, weak and faint. Jack stepped forward to offer her support.

"I hope you will be brave, Miss Ballon," he said. For some moments her head rested against the saddle cloth. Then, with a great effort, she raised her head and Jack saw with a pang how those few seconds had made her wan and ghastly.

"Yes," she said huskily, "I—will be brave. I never harmed Hank Maynard. My father was a gentleman of honor and spirit. I have his spirit and it lives in me as it lived in him. All that I have for my friends, but death and hatred for my enemies! I shall avenge my father!"

Passing a hand across her brow she stood erect. Jack turned to Peters and gave him whispered orders.

When he turned again Bess Ballon held out her hand.

"I trust you, Captain Clark," she said. "Just now I am compelled to ask you for assistance. I have relatives in Grenada. I must find my way thither. I cannot stay here now, and——"

"Have no fear, Miss Ballon!" said Jack gallantly. "I shall not desert you until you are safe with friends once more."

"I thank you!" she replied with feeling.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HARD RIDE.

The Blues, by Jack's order, had now begun to slowly retire. The boy captain saw that nothing was to be gained by further fighting.

The plantation buildings had been destroyed and Ballon was dead. Nothing more could be done.

It was now necessary to resume the ride for reinforcements. So Jack caused his men to slowly fall back.

Maynard and his men sought to push them, but the Blues gave them such hot volleys of musketry that they were glad to draw back.

"We've given them a hot time," declared Hal Martin. "I don't believe they'll care to follow us, captain."

"If they do we'll make it still more disagreeable for them," said Jack. "Now for a hard ride."

The Blues fell back rapidly now and struck into a road leading westward and toward the north branch of the Tallahatchie.

It was from this quarter, as Jack well knew, that Washburne's advance guard might be expected.

He had been ordered by General Grant to advance from Helena, Arkansas, and press upon Pemberton's rear. In the meantime Grant was to endeavor to meet the Confederate general at Grenada.

It was safe to assume that Washburne could not be far away. A hard ride of ten or twelve hours ought to carry the Blues to his advance line.

So, leaving Maynard's men still at the plantation, and as yet hardly recovered from the repulse given them, the Blues rode away.

Bess Ballon mounted upon a spare horse and rode with them. She was an expert rider, as was soon made manifest.

It was not hard for her to keep up with the others. She rode beside Jack and Hal, and in silence. They respected her grief and did not venture to burden her with conversation.

On rode the Blues. A chill wind, for it was now the beginning of winter, blew across the country.

On and on pressed the Blues riding hard all the while. The country through which they passed had not as yet been trod by an army.

It therefore bore a vastly different aspect from that behind them. The plantations looked prosperous. Everything was as in time of peace.

"Great Cæsar!" exclaimed Hal. "This region must have been overlooked. What a chance for foragers."

"I should say so," replied Jack. "Never mind! Their turn will come soon enough. I suppose they regard us as invaders."

"I have no doubt. Hello! what's this?"

From a side lane there had suddenly dashed into the highway a horse and rider. The horse was a scrawny bay. The rider was a type of the poor Southern white.

He had evidently not seen the troop coming. It was also likely that he had not seen a Yankee before.

He pulled his horse up and gaped at their approach with open-mouthed astonishment. It was probable, though, that the blue uniforms told him the character of the riders, for he suddenly lashed his horse into a mad run.

At this the boys all burst into laughter and the cry went up:

"Catch him! Hold him!"

At once several of the Blues set sail for the terrified Southerner. The boys' horses were not fresh, but, despite this, they gained rapidly on him.

Peters, who was the joking spirit of the regiment, shouted:

"Halt! Pull up your horse, Johnnie, or we'll shoot you!"

The Southerner, seeing that he was overtaken, complied. His fear seemed now to be replaced by a sullen defiance.

He drew his horse up and glared at the Boys in Blue, who now thronged about him.

"What were you afraid of?" asked Peters sharply. "Why did you run away from us?"

"I thought mebbe you 'uns was Yankees," he replied. "I reckon they wear blue clothes, don't they?"

"Not this kind of blue," said Peters, winking at his comrades. "Don't you see that we are not so bad as we look?"

"You 'uns are Yankees jest the same," said the fellow with conviction. "We 'uns ain't got no use for you 'uns around here. Why don't ye go back to yer own country?"

"This is Uncle Sam's country, and we are his subjects as well as you," replied Peters. "You'll admit that?"

"We 'uns have our own way of livin', an' you 'uns ain't goin' to change us nuther," said the fellow resolutely.

"My friend," said the corporal with a change of voice, "it is easy to see what has caused this war. You and thousands of others like you have been imposed upon by a lot of

lying, thieving politicians and sharks. They have made you think that we want to deprive you of your institutions and liberties. It is all a complete misunderstanding."

"Do yo' say it ain't so?"

"I do!"

The fellow looked keenly at Peters.

"Then, what are you 'uns down here fightin' we 'uns for?"

"For the reason that we want to preserve the Union."

"Ain't the South got a right to live by herself if she wants ter?"

"She would commit an irreparable wrong if she broke away from the Union," said Peters logically. "We are all one country, and can be the most powerful in the world under one government. But make two governments of us, and there will be an eternal effort on the part of one to jar upon the other. One is indispensable to the other. You and I ought to be friends. The war is a foolish thing. It is all wrong."

"That is right," said Jack, who had been an interested listener, "but neither side will find it out until thousands of lives have been sacrificed and millions spent."

Still incredulity shone in the face of the Southern farmer.

"You 'uns are good talkers," he said. "Why don't you 'uns talk that way to President Davis and our Congressmen?"

"Because they are the leaders of this effort to break the Union," said Jack. "The day is coming when the North and South will understand each other and clasp hands in eternal friendship."

"And union," said Hal Martin.

"The South only wants her rights," said the farmer, "but I will say you 'uns talk fairer than I ever thought Yankees could."

"And we mean it," said Jack. "Have you a farm near here, my good man?"

"I reckon I have, an' a right smart productive one, too."

"I am Captain Clark. May I ask your name?"

"My name is Ward Lamar," replied the farmer. "I hev been all my life in this 'ere country!"

"And that is why you know so little about the Yankees. If you would take a little time and travel through the North you would learn something about us to your advantage. Now, Mr. Lamar, we need hay and grain for our horses. If you will furnish us with the same, I will pay you in good United States money."

The farmer looked at Jack keenly as if he would read his mind.

"Ye'll pay me for it?" he asked.

"Yes, in full!"

"I thought you 'uns took all you could git and paid nuthin' for it."

"Only in cases where the owner is guilty of some treacherous act against us," replied Jack. "We are square with all who are square with us."

"Wall, if that's the way of it, you 'uns kin have all you

want," replied Lamar eagerly. "Jes' follow me down this next road, an' I'll take you 'uns right down inter my yard!"

Jack knew that the horses needed a brief rest and feed. Many of them were on the point of dropping from exhaustion and hunger.

"Lead the way, Mr. Lamar," he said. "We will follow."

Down the side road they galloped for a quarter of a mile. In a little hollow were the rude farm buildings of the Southern farmer.

The hay was stacked in the open air, but this did not injure its quality. The Blues dismounted and proceeded to unsaddle and feed their horses.

Lamar, who had unbent wonderfully, now showed a spirit of genuine Southern hospitality. His family consisted of his wife, a slender and rather delicate woman, his mother and two small children.

The house was old and ramshackle, but the interior was neat and well kept. The coming of the troop of soldiers had at first frightened the humble farmer's family. But when it became patent to them that no harm was to be done them they grew more communicative and sociable. Jack was courteous and pleasant and won the children to his side with clever artifice.

Lamar had plenty of hay and grain and furnished it lavishly. The housewife shyly came to the door, and regarding Jack and Bess said:

"If you 'uns will step inside I'll be pleased to give you 'uns some buttermilk."

"Well," cried Jack, "if there is one thing I love it is buttermilk. Come, Miss Bess, let us respond. Your hospitality, madam, I can assure you is greatly appreciated."

And the farmer's wife, delighted to serve the handsome young Union officer and the beautiful sad-faced girl, brought out a crock of buttermilk with some fine honey, some scraps of pork and some cakes.

With this humble but appetizing spread Jack and his fair companion regaled themselves. It was humble fare, but as compared with army rations a feast fit for the gods.

It is hardly necessary to say that the good woman's hospitality was not wasted.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNDERSTANDING.

"So you 'uns are Yankees?" said the Southern hostess, as she brought out more buttermilk. "You don't seem so much different from we 'uns, after all."

"Certainly not, my good woman," said Jack, "though I don't think we have such buttermilk as that in the North."

It was plain that the handsome young Union officer had won a place in the hearts of these Southern home folks. When the horses were rested and the order was given to mount, Jack placed a silver piece in the hands of each of the children and gave the housewife a greenback.

Tears sprung into the eyes of the good woman and she hesitated to accept the money.

"You 'uns needn't feel obleeged to pay us," she said. "We 'uns don't take money from company."

"Madam," said Jack, with skilful evasion, "this is not to pay you for the buttermilk. I would not insult you in such a manner. I beg you to consider it a gift, which it gives me more pleasure to bestow upon you than it does you to receive."

Jack paid Lamar liberally for the hay and grain. The farmer did not want to accept so much, but the boy captain considered it a fair price.

When the Blues were mounted they gave the farmer and his family a rousing cheer. Then, as they dashed away, it might be safely said that there was one Southern man who had an enlightened opinion of the Yankees and that was Lamar.

The horses, much restored now, galloped on at renewed speed. Mile after mile sped by.

Jack rode far in advance, and he scanned the country closely for some sign of Washburne's advance guard.

He knew that it could not be far away. At any moment they might come in sight of its columns.

But he saw that nightfall was at hand. It was plain that the ride must be continued after dark.

On and on went the troop of cavalry until finally they came to a height of land from whence a wide view of the country beyond could be had.

The horses were now again beginning to tire. On the right was a cornfield.

The ears had long since been harvested, but the shocks remained and would furnish fair feed. Jack pulled rein and gave the order to halt.

"I think we will rest here a few hours," he said. "From this point we ought to be able to see Washburne's column if it comes through the hills. We can also bivouac for a few hours."

Much as he regretted delay it was imperatively necessary. So Jack's orders were obeyed.

The Blues soon had camp-fires blazing. A chill December wind blew across the country.

Jack, muffled in an army overcoat, strolled out toward the edge of the bluff. He gave a start as he saw a slender figure already standing there and seemingly lost in contemplation of the dark country below.

It was Bess Ballon. She was wrapped warmly in an army blanket. The chill wind was nothing to her.

Jack halted, and for a moment thought of retracing his steps, for he was not certain that she would care to be disturbed.

But just then she turned her head and saw him.

"Captain Clark," she said, "I am glad you are here. For a moment I felt as if I was utterly alone on this wide earth and I can assure you the sensation was a depressing one."

"You have my sympathy in your deep sorrow, Miss Ballon," said Jack sincerely. "I know that words are quite inadequate to furnish consolation."

"It is cheering to know that one has a friend," she said.

"I trust you will consider me such."

Jack stood at the moment quite near her. There was a

curious yearning in his bosom to, if possible, lessen the burden which he knew rested upon this young girl's heart.

Jack Clark was not an impressionable youth. Had he been he might at that moment have found himself in danger of becoming a worshipper at the shrine of this fair divinity.

But the boy captain had a romance of his own.

There was at that very moment somewhere in the South a girl just as fair, just as dear and true as Bess Ballon. And she had held a place in Jack Clark's heart which no other could usurp.

When he felt the magic charm of another presence the beautiful face of Nell Prentiss came up to him. The young captain's sense of loyalty was a part of his spirit.

So he was at the moment in no danger. As much could not be said of Bess.

The young Southern girl was conscious that she owed a deep debt to him. He had saved her life. He had stood nobly between her and her worst enemy.

She had felt an uncommon interest in the handsome young Union captain. It was but feminine nature to seek to learn if there was a responsive chord.

"In that respect I am favored of fortune," she said. "I feel deeply my obligation. I can only thank you, Captain Clark, for all you have done for me, for I have nothing else to give you."

"The pleasure I have felt in serving you is my full reward," he replied.

"That is like you," she said earnestly. "It was fully represented to-day, when you gladdened the hearts of those poor exiled souls at the humble little wayside farm."

"My pleasure was greatest," said Jack. "It is not often one finds true appreciation."

"Ah, there is the keynote of all the happiness in this life. Appreciation of one's efforts," she said.

"I quite agree with you."

"You may feel perfectly sure that you were appreciated fully in this case," she said. "I am a Southern girl. I know the home life of these poor misguided people. I know their simple, trusting faith and how they are misled. Think of their restricted conditions, their shut-in sombre lives! It was a beautiful thing to touch their heart strings, to meet them on the basis of truth and Christian friendship. Why, you have become a shrine in their hearts. You gained in that moment the greatest victory of this war."

There was earnestness and depth of feeling in her vibrant voice. For a moment Jack Clark felt it thrill through his veins like an intoxicating draught.

Her presence seemed a delight to him. He drew nearer and he saw her tear-wet eyes looking up at him star-like.

For a moment he seemed to look into her pure soul. Then he held out his hands.

"Miss Ballon," he said, "I wish that all the victories of this war could be won as easily. I could not have had it in my heart to deceive those people."

"You did not deceive them in regard to yourself," she said. "But they will be deceived when some troop led by

one who has not your chivalrous spirit turns into their humble door yard and ruthlessly tears their all from them."

Jack nodded slowly.

"War is a curse," he said.

"And peace is far away," she said. "It has always been thus and ever will be. Men will battle and women will weep!"

For some time there was silence between them. When Bess spoke again there was a different note in her voice.

"Tell me of yourself, Captain Clark," she said, "what has your life been? You are so young! You cannot have been long from school!"

"I left my school to enlist," Jack replied. "What I have to tell of myself is very commonplace. I am the son of a well-to-do merchant of Fairdale, New York. I attended the academy of that town. When the call came for soldiers to go to the front, I joined with the youths of the town in forming a company. We were sent at once to the front and mustered in at Washington. Ah, I can assure you it was a sad day when we left home. We were compelled to bid farewell to our parents and all our friends, perhaps never to see them again. It was much to consider. In my case I was compelled to part with my dear school chum, Will Prentiss, of Richmond, Virginia. Of course he espoused the cause of his father, who was one of President Davis's most trusted men. Will and his sister Nell thus passed out of my life."

"His sister!" said Bess, in a peculiar tone. "She was beautiful?"

"Yes."

"And your friend also."

"Yes." Jack gave a little start, and had it been daylight a flush might have been seen to creep up to his temples. Bess drew her blanket closer and seemed to shiver.

"This wind is getting bitter, Captain Clark," she said. "Your boys will appreciate the fires to-night."

"That is true, Miss Bess," said Jack quietly. "Will you not take my arm? I think we had better return to the camp."

"With pleasure."

They strolled back to the warmth of the camp-fires. Sitting down by the blaze they chatted for a long time.

But they understood each other. There may have been a brief pang in the young girl's heart, for the handsome boy captain had won her respect.

But it had not required a plainer statement from him to apprise her of the truth that Nell Prentiss held his heart.

Though there was a wide gulf between Jack Clark and Nell Prentiss, it was bridged at least by that indissoluble tie which made in life can only end in death—the tie of love.

Bess was a sensible girl and not given to striving after the unattainable. Her sense of honor was too deep to admit of coquetry.

So she learned now to accept Jack as a valued friend. On this level the two young people now found themselves.

It would have been easy for them to fall in love with each other. Jack felt more than an ordinary pleasure in her company. She experienced an indefinable charm in his society.

Somewhile later Bess, rolled in warm blankets, slept in the warmth of the camp-fires. Many of the Blues also retired to rest.

But Jack Clark felt the deep responsibility of the position and could not sleep. After a time he arose and walked out beyond the line of camp-fires.

Soon he stood on the bluff where he had lately stood with Bess. The country lay below him dark and silent.

There were lights twinkling in the valleys below. Plantations and farms made a panorama and these lights were a beacon of their presence there.

But against the sky Jack noticed a dull glow low down on the horizon. Beyond a distant ridge this was strongest.

He gave a comprehensive start. He had seen a phenomenon of this sort before and knew what it meant.

This was that camp-fires burned on the other side of the ridge and their light illumined the sky.

CHAPTER X.

THE SCOUT.

A thrill seized Jack and he exclaimed with conviction:

"It is Washburne's advance!"

So convinced was the boy captain of this that for a moment he thought of calling to his company to turn out at once and ride to the distant camp.

But on second thought he decided not to do so.

He knew that he was not twelve hours' ride from Gordon in his besieged position. The camp of Washburne's guard could not be more than five miles away.

It would be easy enough to get back to Gordon's assistance before the next noon. This would be fully two days before the time of limit given by the cavalry colonel for holding out against Forrest.

By waiting until midnight or later Jack knew that his men and horses would have obtained a rest which was most imperative.

They would be able to make the return dash without further rest.

So he did not give the order to turn out. He remained for some while watching the distant glow in the sky.

At times it was brighter than others. But this he ascribed to changes in the atmosphere. After a while he went back to the camp.

Jack wrapped himself in his blanket and tried to sleep.

He found it almost impossible. He dozed slightly until he heard the call of the picket in weary monotone:

"Post number eight! Twelve o'clock, and all's well!"

Jack sprung up with the impulse to give the order to turn out. But before he could utter the words he heard a picket's call:

"Sergeant of the guard! Post number two!"

Jack, impelled by curiosity, fell in with the sergeant's guard as it filed out and to the post named. The picket

held a man at bay, who could only be dimly seen in the darkness.

"I don't know who he is," said the picket. "He wants to see the captain!"

"I want to see your captain," said the visitor. "I am surprised to find Union troops in this vicinity."

"Who are you?" asked the sergeant.

"I'm Jim Perkins, one of Washburne's scouts," was the reply. "I'm doing a little reconnoitering up this way. When I came upon your camp I was surprised."

"Let the man enter," said Jack, making his appearance. "I will talk with him."

"You?" exclaimed the scout with interest. "Who are you?"

"I am Jack Clark, captain of this company."

An exclamation of delight escaped the scout.

"I am glad to know you, Captain Clark. Are you advance guard of Grant's army?"

"Hardly," replied Jack. "I and my company have been sent to reconnoiter Pemberton and do scout duty along the Tallahatchie. I have found plenty to do since I came here. But at present I am in quest of General Washburne to ask for immediate reinforcements and assistance for Colonel Chester Gordon, who is surrounded by Forrest and his men on the Oxford road."

Perkins, the spy, looked astonished.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed. "What brought Colonel Gordon into this region?"

"He was sent here by Grant to harass Pemberton while you marched up in his rear and surprised him."

"Ah, there's the rub. Pemberton is right onto the game, and we have hardly force enough to attack him. If Grant or Sherman only get up now all will be well. We will surely drive him."

"At present, however, I hope that General Washburne will not refuse to send aid to these besieged cavalymen."

"He will certainly do so. To make sure of it I will return to his camp this moment and tell him all about it."

"One moment, Perkins?"

"Eh? What is it?"

"I believe I will go with you!"

"Very good!" agreed the spy. "It is a good five mile walk."

"Oh, but we will not walk. We have horses."

"Good!" cried the scout. "That will land us in Washburne's camp in an hour. Do you want to see Washburne himself? He is four miles further away. This is only the advance guard under General Preston."

"It is all the same," replied Jack. "I can do just as well with General Preston. Reinforcements is all I want."

"That Forrest is a hard one to beat."

"He certainly is."

"But we will beat him. I am ready any time that you are, captain!"

"I am ready now."

Jack turned and gave an order for his horse and another to be brought. They were quickly brought out. The boy captain had his sword and pistols with him.

So he sprung into the saddle and rode away with the scout. Into the darkness they dashed, riding down the winding road into the valley below.

As they galloped on Jack saw that the glow beyond the ridge grew plainer. He felt a thrill of satisfaction.

He had not the slightest doubt that General Washburne would send men to the aid of Gordon. He felt that his mission was already accomplished.

On they rode through the night. They now began to climb the ridge.

"Has General Washburne as yet felt of Pemberton?" asked Jack. "Has there been any sort of an engagement?"

The scout nodded and said:

"A small engagement was fought a few hours ago ten miles south of here. The right wing of our advance came into collision with a heavy detachment of the Confederates. We drove them back."

"Did they retreat?"

"Yes."

"Ah," said Jack with conviction, "it is just as I thought it would be."

"What?"

"Pemberton will not stand and fight a battle in his present position. General Grant has not yet doubled far enough south to force him back upon Washburne. He will escape."

The scout seemed surprised.

"You think he will fall back on a line to the southward?" he asked.

"I do."

"Humph!" said the scout. "That would be giving away good ground. It would be retiring eventually to Vicksburg, for there is no good battle ground this side of there."

"He may fight at Grenada!"

"Never," said the scout positively. "I flatter myself that I know all this region well. Pemberton will never fight on this side of the banks of the Yalobusha River. He is too good a general, for he might not have the daring and phenomenal luck of Grant at Pittsburg Landing."

"Too bad," said Jack disappointedly. "I fear he will give us the slip then."

"That is just what he will do."

They had now reached the brow of the eminence. A bright glare from the camp-fires of the advance guard fell upon the eyes of both.

"Here we are," cried the scout as he galloped down the roadway only to be met with a sudden sharp hail.

"Halt! Who comes here?"

"Friends!" replied Perkins, drawing rein.

"Advance, friends, with the countersign."

"It's Perkins," cried the scout as he dismounted.

The picket lowered his musket.

"Pass in!" he said.

The scout passed in, followed by Jack. They hurried through the sleeping lines of soldiers until they came to a small tent of the Sibley pattern.

This was the headquarters of General Preston, of the advance guard. Perkins at once applied at the tent entrance. The adjutant made his appearance.

"Is it of great importance?" he asked. "The general is taking a nap, and if it is not important, I will not awaken him."

"It is important," said Jack. "The fate of a battalion besieged by Forrest and his men depends upon it."

"Enough!" said the adjutant. "I will arouse the general."

It was several moments before he reappeared and said:

"The general will see you."

Jack and Perkins entered the tent. They saw General Preston sitting on the edge of his cot bed. He looked decidedly sleepy.

"Ah, gentlemen," he said, "my adjutant tells me that you are in trouble. What is the matter?"

"I have come to ask you for reinforcements," said Jack. "Colonel Chester Gordon was sent by General Grant to scout on your line of advance and protect your supply trains. But on the way hither, Gordon has been attacked by Forrest with an overwhelming force. He is at present surrounded and almost out of ammunition. He will be compelled to surrender if he does not get aid soon."

"The deuce!" cried Preston in dismay. "Where is Gordon at present?"

"Near Sunrise Plantation, on Indian Creek," replied Jack.

"You say he is surrounded?"

"Yes."

"His force is wholly cavalry."

"It is."

Preston was silent a moment. He seemed deeply disturbed.

"To tell the truth," he said, "I am not in first-class condition myself. I don't like to weaken our advance guard. But I see no other way at present. I have five hundred cavalry on my right wing. I will spare you this troop, though it necessitates sending back to Washburne for more."

"That will be sufficient," cried Jack. "I would ask a favor."

"Well?"

"That you will place them under my command."

"Certainly! That is wholly proper. Colonel Bentley is in command at present. I will send an orderly to him to report at once."

"Very good, sir."

Jack felt a thrill of satisfaction. While he knew that the relief force would be small yet he believed that he could so attack Forrest that the Confederate raider would be glad to relinquish his hold on Gordon.

"In asking for the command," said Jack, "I do not wish to depreciate Colonel Bentley's ability to exalt my own. It is simply my desire to make a success of the attack which I think I can do through greater familiarity with the ground."

"I understand you, sir, and you are perfectly right," replied General Preston. "You shall have full command."

Just then the orderly returned.

"Colonel Bentley sends his compliments, sir, and says that he will report in twenty minutes."

"Very good," said Preston. "Now tell me about Gordon and your ride hither, Clark."

Jack detailed the events of Gordon's march and Preston listened with interest. When Jack had finished the cavalry regiment was on hand.

Jack was presented to Colonel Bentley, who at once deferred the command to him without delay. Jack shook hands with Preston and mounted his horse.

Perkins, the scout, also sprung into saddle. "I am going to see this thing out," he cried. "I want to see what Forrest will do when we descend on his rear."

The five hundred cavalymen under Jack's command now set out at a gallop over the ridge and were soon climbing the hills to reach the spot where the Blues were yet in bivouac. This was accomplished in due time.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RELIEF.

A fanfare on the bugle brought the Blues to their feet, and they were astonished to find a heavy reinforcement in their camp. Orders were imperative to get to saddle at once.

It was now three o'clock, and before long day would break. Jack wished to be far on his way before then.

He reckoned that they should by hard riding reach Gordon before noon. A brief rest would have to be reckoned upon before they would be in condition to attack.

Bess Ballon now, however, separated from the Blues. A detail of Bentley's men was assigned to take her to Preston's camp, whence she was to be sent to the nearest railroad station, so that she could get a train to Grenada, where she had relatives.

The planter's daughter bade farewell to the boy captain, with ill-concealed emotion. The Blues gave her a hearty cheer, and she rode away with her escort.

Then, casting one glance after her, Jack put sentiment away and took up stern duty. He sprung into saddle and riding to the head of the troop cried:

"Boys, we're going down to give Forrest the worst licking he ever had. Attention! Fours right! Gallop!"

With a rousing cheer the six hundred cavalymen spurred their horses forward. Down the highway they went at full speed.

For miles they rode on rapidly. The gray light of dawn silvered the east, and soon the sun turned that color into gold.

The morning air was sharp and bracing. Overcoats felt exceedingly comfortable as the troopers faced the wind.

Just about nine o'clock they paused for a bivouac. Two hours more of hard riding, Jack reckoned, would bring them to Sunrise Plantation.

The young captain was now somewhat eager and excited. He wondered if Gordon was still holding out. Had his ammunition lasted? Had Forrest been repulsed?

Or, on the other hand, had the guerrilla been able to bring up artillery, and so drive his intended prey to the wall?

All these things surged through Jack's mind. As the horses munched their forage and the tired cavalymen tried to snatch a little sleep the young captain paced up and down with anxiety.

Hal Martin now approached him.

"What do you think of our chances, Jack?" he asked.

"I hardly know," replied Jack. "I am in hopes, though, that Gordon is still holding out."

"In my mind it is only a question of Forrest's artillery coming up. It is said that he sometimes carries a light battery with him."

"It might dislodge Gordon and force him to attack," said Jack, "but not necessarily defeat him. A counter-charge, however desperate it might seem, might turn the tide for him."

"In which case he would not need our reinforcements."

"Just so."

"However, all this is surmise. We ought to know before long, though?"

"Within two hours, barring accidents."

An hour had been allowed for the feeding of the horses. Now the bugle blew the assembly and the men hastened to saddle their horses.

Once again they were in saddle and riding on at the same terrific pace. This had begun to tell sadly on the horses, as well as the riders.

Still Jack led the way across the country. Through forests of oak, across fields, over ridges of land and past withered cornfields and the broad acres of great plantations they rode on.

All things have an end. And so did that hard ride of the Blues. Suddenly they saw a cloud of smoke hovering over a distant line of trees.

Jack rose in his stirrups. He knew what it meant.

Gordon and Forrest were still fighting. The Union cavalry colonel might be holding out in brave fashion.

"Come on, boys! There is our work," cried Jack grimly.

A rippling cheer ran through the regiment. They sat down to ride harder. Across the swamp road and into the trees they went, under the leafy arches for a mile.

Then the country opened out clear and wide. The ashes of Sunrise Plantation were on the left. Just ahead were seen a huddled line of gray and butternut uniforms.

Jack saw that it was the hospital guard. The ground was strewn with the wounded and the dying.

He passed these by and then came upon the battlefield.

Forrest's men were in a circular line of battle about Gordon's intrenchments. They were sheltered by trees, rail fences, walls and hastily dug trenches. Every charge they had made had been repulsed. Gordon had held his own.

But, though it was not known at the moment by the relief party, the ammunition of the besieged was just about exhausted. The last round had been given out.

When Colonel Bentley's men thus so suddenly appeared in the rear of Forrest there was a sensation.

The Confederates wildly scattered and broke their line. The resistance was feeble. Gordon's men leaped out of the trenches with wild cheers.

In less time than it takes to tell it Forrest was swept back, and the besieged cavalymen were relieved. The battle was over.

Massing at the far end of the field, Forrest made a stand and then began to sullenly retire. Jack chased him as far as the woods.

Then he returned in time to grip hands with Gordon, who had four wounds, the result of desperate hand-to-hand fighting.

"Six times they came into our trenches and we threw them back," said the brave colonel. "Once I thought the end had come. In all the fights I have been in I have never seen one to equal this. Forrest meant to get us."

"But he didn't," said Bentley.

"No, thanks to you and Captain Clark," cried Gordon. "Boy, you must have made a tremendous ride."

"We lost as little time as we could," replied Jack.

"Well, you got here in the nick of time. Half an hour more and we would have been in the hands of the enemy."

"You can see by the condition of our horses that we exerted every effort," said Bentley. "I don't think you need fear more from Forrest now."

"He won't trouble us more," replied Gordon. "But tell me, is Washburne close upon Pemberton's rear guard?"

"Yes; there has already been a sharp engagement between a detachment and the rear guard of Pemberton's left flank."

"Good!" cried Gordon with delight. "What are your orders, Colonel Bentley?"

"My orders were to remain with you as long as I could be of assistance. Then we were to return to Preston's division."

"I see. You cannot return without rest."

"No."

"Very good! We will remain here for another day. Then we will ride with you to meet Preston. We must have ammunition and fresh supplies."

"Very well! My boys will be glad of the rest. There seems to be plenty of forage hereabouts for the horses."

"Yes, plenty of it."

So this plan was at once put into execution. The exhausted troopers threw themselves down in the trenches and went to sleep in daylight. Bentley's men first cared for their horses and then themselves sought rest.

Not until the next morning did any in the troop stir themselves. Then, much refreshed, they answered the reveille in good spirits.

Jack Clark had paid a visit to the ruins of Sunrise Plantation. He made the hideous discovery of Planter Ballou's body hanging from the tree in the garden and taking it down gave it reverent burial.

Gordon had decided to join forces with Preston for the sake of procuring more ammunition. Had they been attacked again by the foe they would have been compelled to resort to their sabres for defense.

Jack Clark and his boys, however, still had their cart-ridge boxes full, for they had not participated in the fight.

Gordon again elected to send them ahead as an advance guard. This was welcome news to the Blues.

They galloped away and soon were far out on the road. To the south were the valleys and lowlands of the Tallahatchie, where Pemberton crouched like a waiting tiger, hoping to spring unawares upon the flank of Grant's advancing army.

But the silent man had cleverly outgeneraled the wily fox of the Confederacy. The advance of Washburne in Pemberton's rear had thrown consternation into the Confederate camp.

Even at that moment Pemberton was hastily making preparations to fall back beyond the Yalobusha.

But, there were scouting parties of the Confederate army ranging far to the north, and it was one of these that the Blues suddenly encountered.

The first premonition of the proximity of the foe was received when a bullet suddenly struck one of the Blues from his saddle. Other bullets hissed among them.

Jack turned his head to see if possible from whence the shots came.

He saw a little puff of smoke on a nearby hillside. In an instant he gave the order:

"Halt! Right face! Dismount!"

The order was instantly obeyed. The horses were galloped to the rear and out of range. Jack hastily deployed his men along the line of the road, using the ditch for a trench.

He saw quickly that the force he had met was numerically superior to his own. But this did not deter him.

He knew that in case of meeting too stubborn a resistance he could expect reinforcements from the rear, for Gordon's men were not two miles away.

The Blues opened fire hotly and for a time the battle raged noisily. Then he saw a gray line leap from cover above. They were coming to the charge.

He saw by their bayonets that they also were mounted infantry. But the boy captain realized that they were certainly foolish in charging when they had so unassailable a position.

"That looks to me like a silly move on their part," said Hal. "They may be sorry for it. Eh, captain?"

"That is right," said Jack. "But we can find no fault. Let them come if they will. We will give them all they want."

Down the hillside came the charging line of gray. Jack now executed a move which was as daring as it was dangerous. He ordered a destructive volley fired into the advancing line.

Then, with quick, sharp orders, he caused his men to fall back across the road and behind the opposite line of fence.

The move was executed like a flash, and before the disorganized charging line had recovered the Blues were again in position.

This time they had two lines of fence, two ditches and the roadway between them and the foe.

CHAPTER XII.

A SERIOUS DILEMMA.

Jack Clark's principle was to invariably save his men. He always looked for a point of vantage where there would be the least chance for a sacrifice of life.

Soldiers recognizing this trait in a commanding officer have always more faith and confidence in him. In all the severe engagements in which the Blues participated this had been the young captain's design to save his men.

Yet he did not flinch in face of danger. The Blues were always foremost on the firing line.

In this case therefore he had secured a remarkable point of vantage.

It would not be easy for the foe to climb those fences and cross the roadway to get at their opponents. They would be cut down like sheep.

But still they came on.

Steadily Jack gave the orders to load and fire. Deadly were the volleys poured into the advancing ranks.

Half of the charging force got over the first fence. Then the blinding storm of bullets drove them back. Up the hillside again they retreated pell-mell.

The Blues rose and cheered wildly. They would have gone in pursuit, but Jack held them back.

"No," he said; "we have got the biggest part of the loaf. Let us not be too greedy. Then again, there may be another chapter to this affair. Ah! look yonder!"

Another gray body of soldiers was seen far down the road. They were advancing on the double-quick.

"Here come reinforcements for the foe!" cried Hal Martin.

"Ah! What did I tell you?" cried Jack. "If we had pursued them we would have been attacked in the rear. As it is, we have a chance to escape!"

The order for the horses was quickly given. They were brought up and the Grays mounted. They had come out of the engagement well, for, while over fifty of the Confederates lay dead on the hillside, the Blues had not lost above six men.

Once in the saddle, the little party of Union soldier boys dashed away down the road. They had not ridden a mile when they saw Gordon's troopers.

They were advancing at a moderate pace. When they saw the Blues coming back at once Gordon called a halt.

He knew what it meant. The enemy were in their front. At once the colonel rode forward to meet Jack.

"Well, my boy," he cried, "what is the report now?"

"We met a detachment of the enemy about a mile from here," replied Jack. "We engaged them, but finding them too strong for us we retired."

"Ah!" said the colonel reflectively. "A party of Pemberton's scouts."

"I really think they were a larger body of men," said Jack. "They seemed to be in greater force. I would not be surprised if it was a portion of Pemberton's left wing."

"Tut! tut!" said the colonel testily, "that is hardly likely, sir."

For a moment the old spirit of jealousy between regular and citizen soldier swayed him. He did not like to have his judgment overruled by the boy captain.

But this only lasted a moment. Gordon was wise enough to see that to yield to such a prejudice at this time was unwise.

So, as his face grew dark with anxiety, he said:

"I don't care to engage any large force at the present moment. We have not enough ammunition."

"I fear it would be unwise," said Jack.

"Then perhaps we had better halt here."

"I would advise it, sir."

Colonel Gordon swept the region about with a comprehensive glance. In his experienced eye there were many reasons why it was not a desirable spot to make a stand against a foe.

The topography of the country was not such as to admit of a good defense. For a time the colonel was undecided.

But, suddenly, in the distance the gray uniforms of the foe were seen advancing. It was no longer a matter of choice.

It was likely that Gordon would have ordered a retreat, but at this moment Colonel Bentley came up.

"Colonel Gordon," he said, "the enemy seem to be in force just ahead of us."

"So it seems," replied Gordon tartly.

"Have you decided on any plan of action?"

"Plan of action, sir? Is there any other way but to stand our ground?"

Colonel Bentley saluted and a grave light shone in his eyes.

"I am glad to receive your orders, sir, as superior in command," he said.

Gordon's face grew red.

"I asked you a question, sir!" he said gruffly. "Is there any other plan but to stand our ground?"

"Do you wish my opinion?"

"I do."

"Colonel," said Bentley in a firm tone, "I know not whether I will have your approval or not, but if I were in command of this regiment I would at once order a retreat."

Gordon nodded slowly and said:

"That is our only course, Bentley. We cannot face the foe with nothing to fight with."

"That is my view, colonel."

"Very well. We will fall back."

Reluctantly the battalion turned their horses' heads and rode back along the road. It was something which no soldier likes to do, this turning back in the face of the enemy.

But in this case it seemed imperative. Only Bentley's men and Jack Clark's company had more than a single round of ammunition. Now it could be seen that the force of Confederates in front were swelling rapidly. It was plain that they had run into Pemberton's left wing.

"I'll wager there is a thousand men beyond that ridge," said Colonel Gordon as he swept it with his glass.

"Colonel Gordon," said Bentley, "I would like to ask a favor of you."

"It is granted in advance," was Gordon's reply.

"I would like to ask the privilege of detaching my brigade from your command. I think that I could do the foe much damage by riding south and devastating the country in their line of advance."

Gordon was silent a moment.

"Bentley, you have given me an idea," he said. "I see no reason why our whole command cannot do that. We need not get near enough to engage their advance guard. If we do, we can depend upon our sabres."

"That is the point," agreed Colonel Bentley. "I am sure much damage can be done. At any moment we may be able to strike one of the enemy's supply trains, when you can then secure a fresh supply of ammunition."

The decision was quickly made. The two cavalry colonels were now in perfect accord, thanks to the tact of Bentley.

At once the advance was made. It was now plain that Pemberton's whole force was advancing, for the ridges had become lined with the uniforms of the Confederate soldiers as far as the eye could reach.

Gordon's cavalry kept beyond the range of the muskets of the advance guard. They now adopted something of a Cossack style of fighting.

Wherever the opportunity offered Bentley's men would dash up and open fire on an isolated portion of the advance line. There would be a hot fight. A quick hard blow would be dealt and then the cavalry would dash away.

Thus matters went on until suddenly a line of Confederate cavalry was seen to move out from the enemy's line. At once Gordon and Bentley both saw danger ahead.

It was easy to see that this force of the enemy's cavalry was fully equal to if not superior to their own. Moreover, they undoubtedly had plenty of ammunition. Colonel Bentley spurred his horse close beside Colonel Gordon's and said:

"That looks bad for us, Gordon. We can't meet them on even terms."

Gordon's brow was dark and clouded.

"Bentley," he said, "we are in a bad box. They will mow us down like sheep. I am afraid our fate is settled."

"We can only trust to a sabre charge."

Gordon shook his head.

"Without our carbines we can hardly hope to stand their attack. However, there is no other chance for us."

The order went down the line to prepare for the enemy's attack. In the meantime the battalion fell back slowly to seek the advantage of ground.

And as they did so Jack Clark recognized what he believed was a sure plan for escape. Just below in the bottom land he saw a wide and deep creek.

Its banks, as he knew, were reedy and marshy and horses could hardly hope to find footing there. Moreover, the stream was too muddy and deep to ford.

Ordinarily Jack would have seen nothing but utter destruction in the presence of this stream in their rear. But

he noted another important fact, which was that the stream was bridged.

At once he dashed up to Gordon, who was in the greatest extremity of his life.

"Colonel Gordon," he said with a salute.

"Captain Clark."

"I have to report, sir, that the enemy's cavalry are advancing to attack us."

"That fact is already known, sir."

"Very good, colonel. I report also of a possible way of thwarting their attack."

Colonel Gordon gasped, and leaning forward clutched Jack's arm. In his dire extremity he was now glad to accept anything from a subordinate.

"Give me your plan, Clark. There is no time to lose. I tell you, we are facing death itself."

"I know that, Colonel Gordon. Will you ride this way with me?"

"I will with pleasure."

Jack led the way to the end of the ridge. He pointed to the lowland.

"Beyond that line of woods," he said, "there is a wide and deep stream. Its banks are marshy. There is no ford-way. Cavalry cannot cross it."

"Well," said Gordon impatiently, "how, then, does that avail us?"

"There is a bridge down yonder which crosses the stream. If we cross it and destroy it we can easily get away before the foe can cross."

Gordon gave a great gulp of relief.

"Clark," he cried huskily, "you have saved me again. You are a wonder! I shall recommend you for promotion."

"I do not seek promotion," replied Jack. "I only wish to remain with my company."

But Gordon, imbued with the new opportunity for outwitting the enemy, quickly gave the order for the battalion to fall back.

The enemy's cavalry saw this move and now pressed forward rapidly. There was no time to lose.

Down into the lowlands rapidly but in good order galloped the Union cavalry. They reached the bridge by means of a narrow causeway of logs and earth.

A few moments later the advance line was upon the creaking structure.

CHAPTER XIII.

AGAIN AFTER FORREST.

Across the rickety bridge the Union cavalry dashed pell-mell. On the opposite causeway they filed to higher ground, where those who had ammunition were posted ready to cover the passage of the others.

It takes time for over three thousand mounted men to pass through so narrow a space. But all possible speed was made.

In a comparatively short space, however, all had crossed.

The Confederate cavalry came swarming over the ridge beyond at that moment.

When they saw the last file of the Union foe leave the bridge they gave a mad cheer and dashed after them.

But Jack had men with axes at the end of the bridge, and they were already at work cutting the beams. It was but short work to so weaken the structure that it began to quiver, and finally with a crash went down.

So loosely was it constructed that with the fall it fell to pieces and drifted down the current. The Confederate cavalrymen swarmed out onto the causeway and many essayed to dash across the marsh.

These latter were mired, while those on the causeway were the target for Bentley's men. The scene was one which baffled description.

The Confederates were furious and baffled. In vain they essayed different ways of effecting a crossing.

If Gordon's men had been well supplied with ammunition they could have held the foe back indefinitely. But knowing this, the cavalry colonel decided to waste no time in the vicinity.

So, after a few volleys, the Union cavalry dashed away at full speed. They rode northward, it being now Gordon's plan to endeavor to ride around Pemberton's flank and effect a juncture with Washburne's force.

Soon they were miles away and out of sight of the foe. Not until nightfall did they draw rein.

By Gordon's calculation they had ridden thirty miles, and as they had borne westward and back again to the south without seeing a sign of the Confederates they must have rounded the enemy's flank.

This belief was soon confirmed when one of the videttes came galloping in with Jim Perkins, the scout. The latter at once rode up to Colonel Gordon and saluted.

"Colonel," he said, "General Washburne's rear guard is only a mile over yonder. He has driven Pemberton back from the Tallahatchie."

At once the news spread like wildfire. The cavalrymen, jaded and dispirited as they had been, rose and cheered themselves hoarse.

At once all sprung again to saddle and were quickly under way. They rode on until the camp-fires of the rear guard were seen.

Here they bivouacked. But the two colonels rode on and reported to General Washburne, who was four miles away with the advance.

There had been but little fighting. Pemberton had given way readily and was taking a southward course. It was apparent that he meant to try and dodge the trap prepared by General Grant.

Jack Clark and his Blues were very willing to seek the opportunity to rest. A requisition for rations and ammunition arrived from Washburne.

That night the Blues spent in bivouac. The next morning Colonel Gordon's orderly came to Jack's camp and said:

"Colonel Gordon wishes to see you at once."

Jack hastened away and soon found the colonel seated on a stump scanning some maps.

"Ah, Clark," he said, "I was just thinking of you and how you saved us from destruction on the bridge yesterday. We came near getting nipped that time."

"We fooled the Johnnies all right," said Jack.

"So we did! Well, my boy, they say that Forrest is raising the dickens south of here. Yesterday he burned twenty wagons of General Washburne's supply train and captured two hundred men."

"That means that we must get after Forrest," said Jack.

"Just so! I have a commission from the general to take all the ammunition we need and a couple of field pieces and chase him to his lair."

"Good! I hope it can be done!"

"It can! All depends upon us. Are your men in readiness for the enterprise?"

"They are," replied Jack. "We only await your orders."

"Very good," said the colonel. "Now I have an idea that we'll find Forrest down here by Duck Bayou. They tell me that he intends to cut off a supply train that is advancing from that direction. General Washburne is much worried about it and has authorized me to intercept him."

Jack saluted and said:

"I await orders, Colonel Gordon."

"You shall have them. This is what I expect of you! Perkins will act as guide. I want you to take the Duck Bayou road and scout the country thoroughly as far as the Grenada road. Do you understand?"

"I am not familiar with that country. But I suppose Perkins is."

"He is. You need only follow him. He will take you through all right. Look out for traps, and when you have located Forrest let me know at once. I shall be advancing behind you all the while."

"It is then substantially the same sort of a program we followed from Holly Springs to Indian Creek."

"Just the same."

"Shall I start at once?"

"Mount your command at once. I will send Perkins right along."

Jack saluted and hurried away. He was much pleased, for he liked the sort of enterprise now in hand. A few moments later he was with Hal Martin.

The young lieutenant was delighted with the prospect. The boys were at once called to mount.

The little command, fully equipped for their ride, was all ready when Perkins, the scout, came riding up.

"I suppose you understand what we are to do, captain?"

"We are to find Forrest if we can."

"Yes."

"I am not familiar with the country below here. I must leave it to you to guide us."

"That is to be my duty. I think we shall find the fox about Duck Bayou. He is lying in wait for one of our supply trains."

"Ah, then it is quite important that we should find him."

"It is."

Jack now gave the order and the Blues galloped away.

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(Continued from page 24.)

They were soon riding out across the country to Duck Bayou.

It was only a ride of twelve miles and it required little more than an hour to reach that locality. It was a region of swamp and lowland, with little inlets and bayous from the Tallahatchie.

A more ideal place for guerrillas to hide could hardly be conceived. It was one of Forrest's favorite stamping grounds.

The Blues now advanced with great caution. They knew that at any moment they might stumble upon the foe, with serious results.

Videttes were sent far ahead and every precaution adopted.

But, when nightfall came, they halted on a little neck of land between two inlets, and no sign of the Confederate raider had been seen.

To go prowling around in the dark would have been dangerous, so Jack called a halt and decided to bivouac until daylight. By that time the wagon train would be due.

So the Blues encamped under the cover of some oaks. Fires were not lighted, as Jack deemed it dangerous, the country being so level that their blaze could be seen for miles.

The Blues therefore corralled their horses and rolled themselves up in their blankets on the ground. The night was intensely chilly.

When camp was made Jack and the scout Perkins decided to take a walk beyond the line of pickets. The young captain conceived an idea that some clue might be gained by a visit to a nearby negro settlement.

So they left the camp and struck out through the lowland by means of a trail dimly visible in the starlight. They walked on silently, the scout leading the way.

It was some while before they finally crossed a small creek on a log, and coming to a dense growth of buttonwood trees saw the light of the negro village.

"This is part of the plantation of old Judge Wentworth," said the scout. "He was not a slaveholder and had a mania for liberating the black people and establishing free communities among them. It was his idea of philanthropy. All of these people here were once slaves whose freedom he had purchased. He gives them the use of the soil here."

Jack was interested.

"That seems to me like misguided philanthropy," he said. "How can the poor wretches advance themselves?"

"That is a problem to be solved by the next generation. The judge feels that he has done his part. Some of these negroes are fairly intelligent. We will see what we can gain from them in the way of news."

Just then the scout gave a start and came to a halt. In his path there had appeared a half-naked figure.

"Hello!" exclaimed the scout. "Who goes there? Who are you?"

"Ise only brack man, sah," was the reply. "Ise Jim Fry."

"Ah, that's it, eh? Well Jim Fry, I believe you are just

the fellow I want to see," said the scout. The negro made a move to retreat, but Perkins hastened to add:

"Don't be afraid! I am a friend! We are Yankees!"

The manner of the negro changed at once.

"Golly! Am dat so, massa? Yo' ain't comin' yere den fo' to take us po' brack men back to slavery?"

"Oh, no," replied the scout. "I want to get information regarding Forrest, the guerrilla."

The negro stepped nearer. His voice was eager and his manner excited:

"Does yo' mean de Confederate general, sah?" he asked. "Yes."

"Massy sakes, sah! General Forrest and his men am ober to de ole plantation house ob Judge Wentworth, an' I done reckon dey am habbin' high jinks ober dere. Yo' kin jest go ober by dat ere path an' yo' came to de house in about half an hour, sah."

This was a thrilling bit of news to Jack and the scout. They had hit upon the scent at last.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE MANSION.

The declaration of the negro that Forrest's men were at the abandoned residence of the deceased philanthropist, Judge Wentworth, only a half hour's walk away, was a revelation to Jack and the scout.

But the discovery was just what they had been seeking. They lost no time. Jack pressed a silver piece into the negro's hand and said:

"Jim Fry, will you guide us there?"

"Yo' bet I will, massa."

"All right! We are going back for our men. Wait for us here."

"All right, sah."

Rapidly Jack and Perkins made their way back to the camping place of the Blues. When they reached there they passed the picket guard and met Hal Martin.

The young lieutenant saw at once that something unusual had happened.

"What's up now, Jack?" he asked. "Have you found Forrest?"

"We have located him all right if that negro is to be believed," replied Jack. "Call the boys to arms at once. We will sneak over and see how many of them there are. Of course, if there are too many of them and Forrest's whole force is there we will wait for reinforcements."

It did not take Hal long to silently call the company to arms. They turned out quickly. As no camp-fires had been lighted their presence was unknown to the foe.

With muffled orders the Blues fell into line, and they pressed forward as silently as possible. It was not many minutes before they had reached the spot where Jim Fry was waiting.

The negro crept out of the undergrowth as they appeared and now led the way.

Through the oaks they proceeded, and it was not long

before lights twinkled in the distance. Then they reached higher ground. On either side were long disused fields. The mansion house of the philanthropist judge, who was now dead, was seen.

The negro now halted.

"Massa," he whispered, "I don' keer fo' to go no fuder wif yo'. Dere am de judge's ole house, an' yo' will find dat Forrest an' his men am dere."

"See here, Jim," whispered Jack. "How large a force is there? How many men?"

"I reckon dar ain' mo' nor two hundred."

"Two hundred!" exclaimed the boy captain audibly.

"Then it is only a small detachment of Forrest's troop."

"Yas, sah! I done reckon dat am it. Only jes' a small number, sah."

"Oh, well," exclaimed Jack, "I think we need send for no reinforcements. I don't believe Forrest himself is here."

Jim Fry scratched his woolly head.

"Yo' don' need fo' to tink ob catchin' dat man," he said.

"He am got eyes in de back ob his head. He am jes' as slippery as an eel. Yo' kin bet he knows wha' he's doin'."

"See here, Jim Fry," said Jack affecting anger, "you told me Forrest and his men were over here. You lied to me."

"Fo' de Lor', massa, I did'n' tell yo' dat General Forrest himse'f was hyar. I jes' tole yo' some ob his men was hyar."

"Do you know if there are others in the vicinity?"

"No, sah. I don' fink dar is. I jes' fink dese men jes' come down hyar fo' to hab a good time by deirselves. Dey don' do nuffin' but jes' play cards an' hab a good time ober dere. Mah Aunt Sally, she done went ober dere yisterday and cooked fo' dem. Dey gib her lots of money. Dey am a kunnel; I tink he am Kunnel Main. He am berry drunk mos' ob de time, sah."

Jack gave a great start. He and Hal looked at each other in the gloom.

"Colonel Main?" exclaimed Jack. "See here, Jim, haven't you got it wrong? Isn't his name Maynard?"

The darkey started up.

"Oh, yas; yas, sah!" he cried. "Dat am jes' it. His name am Kunnel Maynard."

"That's it," exclaimed Jack with delight. "We have the fox, I tell you. We will put him where he can do no more harm. I'll wager he has already some scheme on hand against the happiness of Bess Ballon."

"That is it," cried the young lieutenant. "Suppose we surround the house and spring a surprise upon them."

"It is our game."

At once Jack gave orders for the Blues to advance again. But as they did so a surprising discovery was made.

The Confederate guerrillas were encamped on the other side of the house, and near the stables where their horses were quartered a picket guard paced up and down a hundred yards this side of the house. This was the only hindrance to advancing upon the ancient mansion.

When Jack made this discovery he changed his plans. He had not men enough to make a line about the entire encampment, house and all. It would make the line too thin.

"I have an idea," he whispered to Perkins, the scout. "It is evident that they are lax in the matter of guards. They evidently feel secure and do not dream that there is a Yankee within twenty miles."

"Now I think that it will be a good plan, if possible, to surprise that sentry. Once he is out of the way, we can creep up on this side of the house and mass for a charge upon the camp. At the same time we can make sure of the inmates of the house, among whom no doubt is Maynard."

"Your scheme is a good one," declared the scout. "If you wish I will get the sentry for you."

"Do you think it can be done without alarming the guard?"

"I feel so sure of it that I only ask you to leave it to me."

"I shall be pleased to do that."

"I only ask for the assistance of your negro."

"Jim Fry?"

"Yes."

"He is yours. Here, Jim, come here."

The negro approached and Perkins took him in hand.

"Now, Fry," he said, "I want you to walk up to that picket. Ask him to let you through the lines. He will ask you for the countersign. Tell him you have a pass. Take some time in looking through your pockets for it. In the meantime I shall be creeping up behind to attack him."

The negro seemed to catch the idea at once. He was one of the most intelligent of those on the place.

"All right, massa," he agreed. "I jes' reckon yo' wants me fo' to keep him busy so yo' kin nab him from behind."

"That's the whole thing, Jim. You have got a good head."

"Yas, sah! It am berry hard, sah."

"I don't doubt it," laughed the scout. "Well, go ahead and carry out the plan."

"Yas, sah."

Crouching in the undergrowth, the Blues watched the proceeding. They could dimly see the sentry as he paced back and forth.

They saw the negro approach him slowly.

The picket brought his gun down and gave a sharp hail:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"It am jes' me, sah, Jim Fry, sah; I jes' wants to go in de house an' git suffin' fo' mah Aunt Sally, sah."

"You can't pass here without the countersign."

"Dunno wha' dat is, sah. Only jes' wants to stay a lily while, sah."

"Well, you can't pass here without the countersign. Get out quick!"

"Yo' won't lemme pass?"

"No, sir."

"I done show yo' a pass from General Forrest. I reckon yo' let me in den."

"If you have a pass signed by the general you can come in. But you haven't got it."

"I'll show yo'."

The picket's attention was completely absorbed by the negro, who was making a great fuss searching his pockets.

Just then out of the gloom like a shadow, lightning-like and deadly, shot a silent figure.

A quick spring forward and strong fingers encircled the throat of the guard. He made a convulsive struggle, but a voice hissed in his ear:

"Cease your resistance or you die."

Quickly a gag was slipped into his mouth and he was bound. Then the Blues crept forward and past the line like silent shadows.

They crept up to the house and threw themselves down under the windows. Jack Clark and Perkins peered through one of them and beheld a remarkable sight.

At a long table sat half a dozen men in uniforms of gray. They were captains and lieutenants. One of them wore a colonel's uniform.

He was instantly recognized as the villain Maynard.

On the table were the remains of a feast. Bottles of whiskey and empty glasses showed that all had been drinking.

Two of the officers were so maudlin drunk that they leaned their heads on the table and slept.

On a wall opposite ticked a clock. As Jack looked in through the window the Confederate colonel filled his glass with whiskey from a bottle.

"Come, McLain," he cried, prodding one of the officers, "I want you to drink with me."

"Eh?" said the captain sluggishly. "What will you drink to?"

"What will we drink to?" cried the colonel, raising his glass. "We'll drink to the prettiest girl in the South, to the flower of the Mississippi; the rose, the lily pales before her. To the health of my future wife."

They drained their glasses.

"D—didn't know you was married, Maynard," said McLain.

"I am not as yet," cried the colonel. Then he pointed to the hands of the clock with his sword scabbard.

"When that hour hand reaches twelve," he said, "I expect her to step into this room. She is mine, for I have entrapped her, and my men will bring her here within the hour. There is an old negro preacher on this plantation. I will have him brought in, and we will have a wedding. Hear, you that? A wedding, I say! You're drunk, McLain."

Maynard laughed shrilly. The captain raised his hand in clumsy protest.

"I—hic—never was more sober in my life. I don't drink, sir."

"Only when it is put under your nose," scoffed Maynard. "Well, I can see that you don't believe me when I tell you that I shall be married to-night in this room."

McLain leered at him. "Who's the happy woman?"

"What? Don't you know her?"

"Haven't the pleasure."

"Well, you knew that rich old miser, Jephtha Ballon, of Sunrise Plantation?"

McLain started up and hit the table a crashing blow with his fist.

"What," he roared; "you don't mean Bess Ballon, the prettiest girl in this part of the South?"

"That's what I mean."

For a moment the captain seemed to be trying to overcome the effects of the liquor.

"Confound you, Maynard! You've got me drunk, or I'd take you to task for insulting Bess Ballon. Why, you dark scoundrel, I held her on my knee as a baby. She's as dear to me as my own child."

McLain ceased speaking and Maynard partly arose. There was the tramp of feet in the hall beyond.

CHAPTER XV.

A VILLAIN'S FATE.

Jack Clark had listened spell-bound to all this, every word of which came plainly to his hearing. So absorbed had he been that he had not noted that a body of horsemen had ridden up to the entrance on the other side of the mansion.

These, a dozen armed men, had entered the house. Between them they half led, half carried a female figure.

And now the door of the dining hall burst open, and these rough troopers forced their way in. Between them was their prisoner.

Jack gasped as he recognized the pallid, though beautiful features of Bess Ballon.

He understood now what it all meant. He knew now why Maynard had detached his command from Forrest's main army and had come to this apparently secure place.

His minions had been on the track of the young girl and they had captured her. She seemed once more in the power of her deadliest foe.

For a moment, pallid but defiant and courageous, she stood there with the armed guards on either side. Her burning gaze met that of her persecutor.

Maynard had arisen and taken a step forward. There was an exulting light in his baleful eyes. It was to him a moment of triumph.

"Ah, my pretty rose," he said in a sibilant voice, "at last you are mine. You could not escape me. The world is not so wide but that I would bring you back. You are mine! This is the greatest victory I have ever won. Listen, it is useless for you to resist further. I have a preacher near at hand. He will quickly make us man and wife——"

"Never!" in tones of thunder, cried McLain, as he stepped forward. The Confederate captain seemed to grow sober on the instant. His manner was one of fierce rage.

"You villain!" he cried. "I am not such a craven that I will stand by and see such a wrong enacted. Bess, I will defend you to the last drop of blood in my veins. Fall back there, men! Clear the way!"

"Halt! I countermand that order!" roared Maynard. "McLain, you forget yourself. I am commander of this troop. My word shall be obeyed."

"In all matters for the good of the cause I recognize your authority," replied McLain. "But when it comes to villainy I owe no obedience to you nor any other man on earth."

Bess had started toward the brave champion of her rights, with eager joy. But the guards restrained her. The two men, McLain and Maynard, faced each other, quivering with passion.

"You forget yourself, Captain McLain," gritted Maynard. "This is a matter of my own, and you have no right to interfere."

"I shall interfere. Jephtha Ballon was my patron and friend. This young woman I held on my knees when she was an infant. I am going to defend her against you."

McLain stepped forward with folded arms and faced Maynard. The latter was purple with rage.

"Fool!" he gritted. "I order you under arrest!"

"I resist your order," cried McLain, his sword leaping from its sheath. "The man who advances to lay hands on me dies!"

Up to this point Jack Clark and the scout Perkins had been interested listeners. Now the young captain turned.

"Hal," he said quickly, "I am going to take a dozen men and go into the house. Deploy the company in line and charge on the encampment on the other side of the house. Capture or kill every one of them."

"All right, captain!"

The Blues sprung up and quickly fell into line. Jack and his detachment sped around to the front porch. They were fired on by a sentry, but he was shot down, and they sprung into the house.

But a sentry in the hall had given the alarm. The guard at the room door fled incontinently. When Jack flung open the door to enter the dining room it was to behold a startling scene.

Bess Ballon was crouching in a corner of the room, with a prayer on her white lips. McLain and Maynard were desperately fencing with their swords. The other officers had sprung through the windows save two, so drunk that they lay helpless on the floor.

Bess at sight of Jack gave a wild cry of joy and sped to his side. But just at that moment, with a fierce lunge, McLain drove his sword through Maynard's body.

The villainous colonel lurched forward and fell in a heap. McLain turned and saw Jack Clark and his men in the doorway.

He instantly reversed his sword and extended it hilt first to Jack.

"I surrender," he said. "You have come just in time, for I may expect more mercy from you than from my own people now."

"Sir!" said Jack calmly, "you have proved yourself a man of honor. You shall have good treatment while in our hands."

"You—you know this young woman?"

"I do," replied Jack. "I once before rescued her from this same scoundrel. He has met a deserving death, for it was by his orders that Jephtha Ballon was hanged."

"Then I have only been the instrument of justice," said McLain.

"You may so regard it," declared Jack. "But now there is fighting outside. My men are attacking the camp. Bess, I will leave you here with your champion, who I am sure will look after you."

"You may trust in my honor, captain," said McLain. "I shall need no guard over me, if you choose to leave me without."

Jack hastened out of the house. But he found that the Blues had so completely overwhelmed the guerrillas that they had surrendered at once.

The fight was over, and an almost bloodless victory won. Confession by one of the Confederate officers revealed the fact that Forrest was in the vicinity of Grenada.

Jack Clark wasted no time. Very quickly he formed a line about his prisoners and marched away northward to meet the Union advance.

A day later he delivered them to the Union authorities, and the Blues reported to the main army headquarters. General Grant in person congratulated them on their brave work and promised to at once assign them to new duties.

Colonel Gordon had been recalled and sent to the rear as a rear guard. The advance had now moved onto Coffeeville, near Grenada.

It was plain that Pemberton was rapidly falling back behind the Yalobusha River to make a last determined stand against Grant's advance. It was at this time that Van Dorn swept across the rear of Grant's army, though, and spoiled all his plans by capturing Holly Springs and all the army supplies.

The details of this may make material for another story, however, and for the present we will take our leave of the Blues and brave Jack Clark.

Winsome Bess Ballon was safely escorted to the Confederate lines and reached her friends in Grenada safely. She never saw Jack Clark again, but it is safe to say that the young captain's handsome features were long mirrored in her heart.

With this statement, we will for a brief while take our leave of Captain Jack Clark and the Fairdale Blues.

THE END.

Read "AT CEDAR MOUNTAIN; OR, THE BOYS IN GRAY WITH STONEWALL JACKSON," which will be the next number (26) of "Blue and Gray Weekly."

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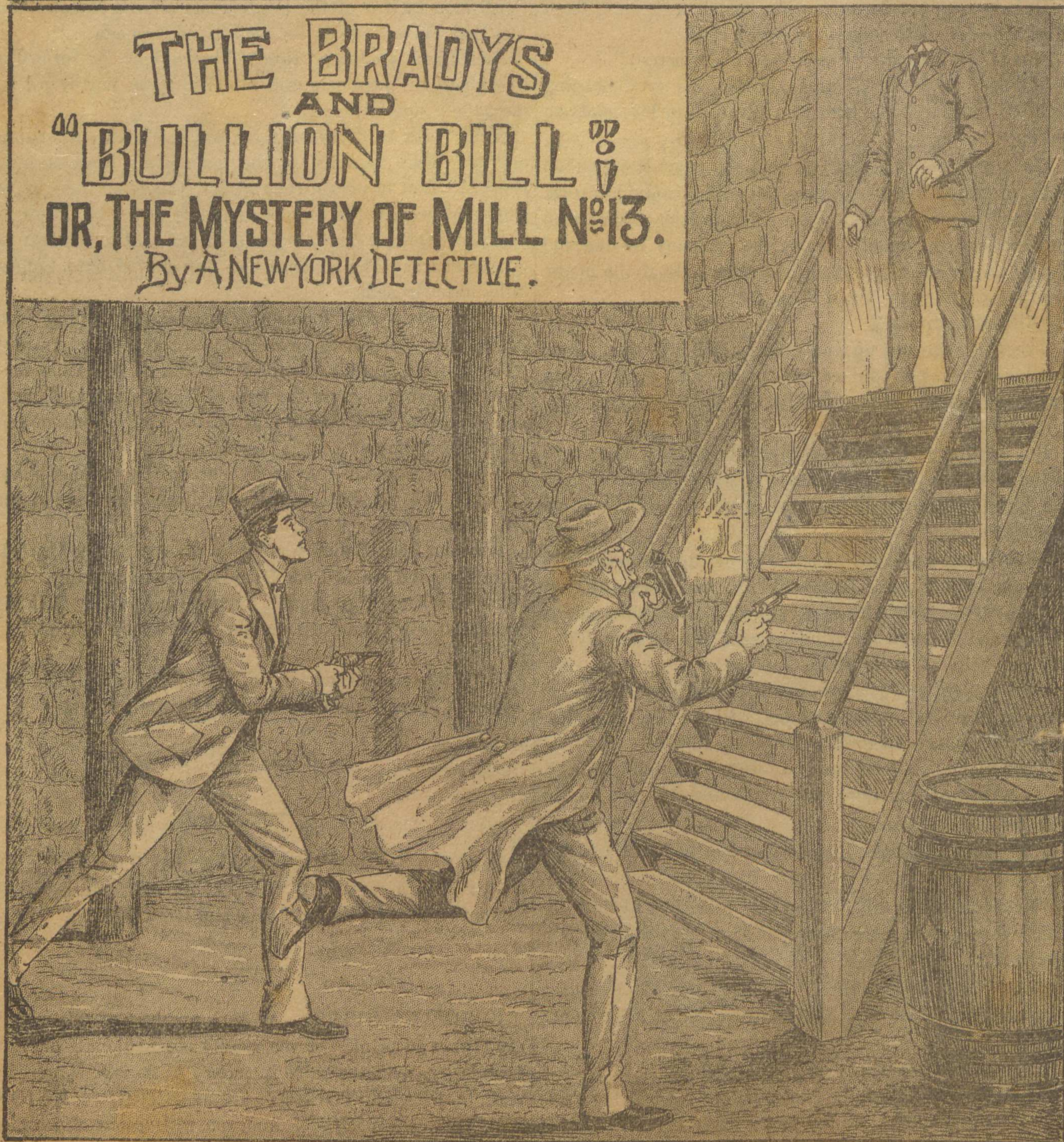
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